戦う司書
恋する爆弾
Tatakau Sisho to Koisuru Bakudan
Ishio Yamagata
山形石雄
Illustration
Shigeki Maeshima
前嶋重機
スーパーダッシュ

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D スパードダッシュ

Human Bombs
Colio
Colio
A boy with a bomb embedded inside of him. Lives only so he can kill Hamyuts.
Relia
Relia
The leader figure. Retains more of his knowledge and memories compared to Colio and the rest.
Cigal
Cigal
A boss from the Indulging God Cult. By controlling the human bombs, he aims for Hamyuts.
Nekojiro no hime
Calico Princess
A princess from the Book Colio obtains.

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Tatakau Shisho to Koisuru Bakudan

characters

Armed Librarians

Mattalast

Mattalast

Armed Librarian. His Magic ability is Prediction and he is proficient with a gun.

Hamyuts

Hamyuts

Boss of the Armed Librarians who is the world's strongest. She is ruthless and unmatched in her love for battle. Uses a sling and her Sensory Threads.

Mirepoc

Mirepoc

Third-Class Armed Librarian. She's an overly-serious girl who's still young.

Chapter 1: A Bomb, a Book, and a Grey Town

“Colio Tonies.”

Someone said in the darkness.

Colio Tonies raised his face. He couldn’t see anything. He peeled his cheek off the stone floor.

His chest hurt, and the sound of wind would pass through its back whenever he breathed. The inside of his mouth was hot, covered in dry mucus, and by moving his tongue he could feel that something was peeling off. It was immensely painful. However, Colio wasn’t in the right state of mind to care about that.

When he tried moving his hand to wipe the dirt off his face, nothing came of it. His arms were bound by some sticky wet rope. Both of his hands were crushed under his body that faced upwards, and he couldn’t move even one finger.

“Colio Tonies. What are humans?”

It was a man’s voice, but there were no human figures around. Next to Colio on the stone floor was an antique gramophone with a spinning copper disc. The man’s voice resounded from the gramophone’s speaker.

Facing that, Colio answered.

“Humans are the favorite amongst God’s children. They are the ones able to connect the lights of Heaven and Earth. Using love and freedom, they weave the tapestry of happiness with their lives.”

Colio no longer understood what he was saying. He just had to say it.

He had a feeling he hadn’t eaten anything since the noon of the day before yesterday. His memories were fuzzy, so he couldn’t remember if he had actually eaten or not.

His bound wrists hurt. His skin was sodden with sweat and his uncovered flesh began festering.

He couldn’t feel his fingers. He didn’t even know if he had fingers.

“Continue, Colio Tonies.”

“A wounded human must be helped.

A suffering human must be saved.

A lonely human must be loved.”

“Why is that?”

“It is because all humans were born to become happy. They were born to be loved.”

“I’ll ask once again. What are humans?”

“Those with the right to gain all the happiness of this world. Those who will love, be loved, be satisfied, will not suffer, and gain supreme bliss for their entire lives.”

“Good.”

Colio continued his conversation with the gramophone.

The contents of that conversation were already decided in advance. He was not allowed to say anything other than what was decided. He was also not allowed to think of anything other than what was decided. Colio had no value to the gramophone.

“So, Colio Tonies. Why do you act like this?”

“Because Colio Tonies is not a human.”

“What is Colio Tonies?”

“Colio Tonies is a bomb.”

“Colio Tonies is a bomb.”

“Colio Tonies is a bomb.”

Suddenly, Colio realized someone was looking at him. The door to this stone room that could contain only two people had been opened at some point, and a lone man entered.

Colio's right shin ached. The man had stepped on his leg. It was crushed against the stone floor, his bones creaking in pain. Just when he thought his foot was going to be separated from his knee, now his hip was kicked. Colio’s body rolled across the floor like a pencil. He weakly raised his neck while lying down.

At some point, the gramophone had stopped. This time, a man had inquired him directly instead of it.

“Colio Tonies. What are you?”

“Colio Tonies is a bomb.”

Colio’s answer seemed to please the man.

“A satisfactory answer.”

As he said that, the room was lit. Colio, blinded by the light, raised a pained cry.

“Seems like that's enough.”

The man said. What exactly was enough, Colio wasn’t able to understand. His body ached and tired. He didn’t want to think about anything, nor did he want to feel anything.

“Colio Tonies. I will tell you the reason you were born.”

The voice said to Colio who was lying on the cold stone floor.

“You were born in order to kill Hamyuts Meseta. Repeat after me, Colio Tonies.”

Despite tiring and aching, Colio accepted the man's words. Who was Hamyuts Meseta? Why is she to be killed? How will I kill her? There were all sorts of things he didn't understand, but he had no problems with that.

"Colio Tonies was born in order to kill Hamyuts Meseta."

The man standing next to Colio said.

"Once again, repeat."

"In order to kill Hamyuts Meseta."

"Once more."

"In order to kill Hamyuts Meseta."

"Kill Hamyuts Meseta."

"To kill Hamyuts Meseta."

The rope binding Colio's wrists was undone. Feeling pain when his skin came in touch with the surrounding air, Colio frowned.

"Kill Hamyuts Meseta."

"To kill Hamyuts Meseta."

Colio crawled and rose on his feet.

"Kill Hamyuts Meseta."

"To kill Hamyuts Meseta."

Colio muttered. The gramophone had already stopped, the man had already left, and no one was talking to Colio.

"To kill Hamyuts Meseta."

Inside the empty room, Colio muttered to himself.

That was Colios Tonies's earliest memory.

A wind came blowing in from somewhere. That stagnant wind stank of dust. Colio Tonies awoke by this smell. In front of his face was a wooden bed that smelled the same, as well as flimsy bed sheets that hung on top of it. Colio realized he was awake.

It was bright outside; it was morning. Beyond the smoky glass window, an even smokier sky and clouds could be seen.

He hadn't dreamed in a long time.

It was a dream of Colio's earliest memory.

To kill Hamyuts Meseta. From the day he had learned those words, half a year had passed.

Colio stretched his body inside the dusty bed.

It was a narrow room in the second floor of a small inn, housing just three beds. There was a moth's corpse on the kerosene lamp hanging from the ceiling. Colio was lodging in this room full of spider webs.

"…If I'm not touching it, it's not painful. But just moving my body hurts."

A voice said. Next to Colio's bed, two men were talking. Colio knew both of their names. Relia Bookwatt and Hyoue Janfus. Hyoue Janfus was lying in bed, half naked, while Relia Bookwatt sat next to him. It seemed Relia was looking at Hyoue's chest.

"Does it hurt when you bend forward?"

"It always hurts when I move… here look, it's festering."

Hyoue groaned in pain. When Relia looked at it, he grimaced.

"Ah, you're right. It is festering."

"Yes. I've been feeling strange since last night."

Relia's bed was tidied up. It seemed the both of them already woke up earlier.

"What's wrong?"

Colio asked Relia.

"Hyoue feels bad."

Relia said.

"He's festering. Maybe some dust entered the hole in his chest. Doesn't seem like it happened to me… what about you, Colio?"

As he said this, Colio put a hand on his chest. His chest was thin and skinny such that he could feel the texture of his ribs.

In the center of his chest, a little right to his heart – Colio's hand could feel a large stone.

Colio carefully stroked the stone embedded inside of him.

Now that he thought about it, he was feeling some discomfort. By pressing the stone and feeling the pressure on his lungs, he became breathless.

"Maybe. I think it's because of the outside air."

"Oh. I think so, too."

Saying this, Relia unbuttoned his grey shirt. He exposed his chest that looked just as unhealthy as Colio's.

In the middle of it, just like Colio, a large stone was embedded.

“Because the air here is bad… look. Dust is gathering between the stone and the flesh. We should have wiped it before.”

In order to bury the stone inside, some flesh in their chests was gouged out. Their skin was cut like a dissected frog, and a gaping hole opened in their breast. Some of their ribs have been removed.

After embedding the stone, they covered the skin that was torn open and sewed the stone to the skin with nails. The stretched dead skin became blackened and dry. The gap between the torn dead skin and their ribs and dead muscles allowed wind to flow in.

A clay-like reddish brown stone was implanted inside. It was about as large as a fist.

Bare copper wire stood out on the surface like blood vessels. It was padded by nails and metal pieces around it.

A vacuum tube was adhered to the bottom. It contained black powder inside. The black powder was gunpowder that could explode at room temperature.

“If you make a wrong move, it might explode. I don’t think it’s going to happen now, but…”

Relia said anxiously while stroking the stone. Both Relia and Colio knew the clay-like stones were filled with highly explosive material. If the vacuum tube would be cracked and the gunpowder ignited, everything in the proximity would be reduced to ashes.

Relia had a bomb embedded within his chest.

“We’d better be careful. If one of us explodes, we’re all going down with him.”

Hyoue said. His chest also contained the same bomb as Relia, of course.

“Ah, right.”

Colio who said this was the same.

The three men who had bombs inside of their chests looked anxious.

“Hyoue, does it still hurt?”

Relia was stroking Hyoue’s bomb. Hyoue moaned as if about to vomit.

“…But, it became a bit better. If I rest for a bit, it’ll be fine.”

“I see, well, for the meantime I’ll wipe your wound. And afterwards…”

Trying to continue speaking, Relia’s words stopped short.

Colio knew why they did.

“Relia, there’s no ‘afterwards’.”

Colio said. Relia’s expression didn’t change.

“Oh, right.”

“Let’s quickly kill Hamyuts Meseta before my bomb is broken.”

Hyoue said with a frown.

“Right. Let’s quickly kill Hamyuts Meseta.”

Colio repeated after him. Relia repeated it as well.

“Let’s kill Hamyuts Meseta.”

“Let’s kill Hamyuts Meseta.”

“Let’s kill Hamyuts Meseta.”

The three men repeated the words again and again, as if becoming a chorus.

“Have you calmed down?”

Relia said. Hyoue nodded and lowered the hem of his shirt.

The three were seated on their beds. In the room of the cheap inn they were staying in, there was almost nothing other than the beds. There was not a table or a single chair.

“If you begin festering again, wipe it quickly.”

Relia said.

“Okay.”

Amongst the three of them, Relia had tentatively acted the role of a leader.

There was no special reason for this – perhaps because he was the oldest, or because he had some knowledge. Colio thought he was in his twenties. But he couldn’t tell for sure.

With his fearless, strong eyes, Relia naturally became their leader.

Hyoue was older than Colio, but should be younger than Relia – around seventeen or so. He had no special features to the extent Colio had trouble remembering his inconspicuous face. This boy who had the complexion of a sick person always looked fearful even while just sitting.

Amongst the three, Colio was the youngest. He was probably around fifteen years old. He was the shortest of them, and he looked even smaller because of the way his back was hunched while standing.

His long bangs concealed his eyes and the hair on the back of the head reached the nape of his neck. When looking from the side, it seemed as if he had some rags on his head.

His face was as gloomy and lifeless as Hyoue’s. Only his eyes were tinged with some strange dark light.

The three were wearing khaki-colored pants and grey linen shirts. As they were not ironed for years, the clothes were wrinkled and faded.

On hangers by the beds, three brown jackets faded in a similar way were hanging. Besides their different sizes, they were exactly the same product.

“What are we doing now?”

Relia said to the two.

“We’ll kill Hamyuts Meseta.”

Colio answered. So Relia asked again.

“So, what are we going to do for that?”

“…”

Colio hadn’t thought of anything.

“For now, we’re just tourists.”

Said Hyoue.

“Let’s go sightseeing.”

Colio and Relia looked at each other.

“Right.”

“That’s good.”

As they said that, the three of them slowly stood up.

The three men’s luggage they had at the inn was small. It all fit inside a small brown bag for each of them.

“Should we bring this?”

Colio asked.

“I think we should only take what we need.”

Said Relia.

“Right.”

On the inside of the cloth bag, written characters could be seen.

‘Kill Hamyuts Meseta’.

Inside the bag were things like a change of clothes, maps, a diary, a wallet, a pen and ink. Words were written on the pen’s handle.

‘Kill Hamyuts Meseta’.

On the map, something was written in red.

‘Kill Hamyuts Meseta’.

He used the diary every day. That was also true of Relia and Hyoue. The diary’s contents were the same every day.

‘Today I haven’t killed Hamyuts Meseta.’

Something was written on the last page. It wasn’t Colio’s writing.

‘Today I exploded with Hamyuts Meseta.’

For now he took out the map and wallet. He didn’t know how to use anything else.

“What about the knife?”

“I don’t know, just bring it.”

Relia said.

There was a knife in a hidden pocket inside his pants. Colio found the knife inside. And even on that knife’s blade it was written:

‘Kill Hamyuts Meseta’.

“Let’s go.”

Relia said.

The three slowly left the room.

They left the inn and went into the town.

Colio’s eyes reflected the white-tinged grey sky, as well as the black-tinged grey town.

The three were in a town known as Toatt Mining Town.

With 5000 people living in it, it was a small town.

Toatt Mining Town was on the western edge of the largest country of the world, the Ismo Republic, and located in the middle of the Plote mountain range.

The town was surrounded by a huge mountain range that extended from north to south, bordering on dry Great Plains to the west, and a vast ocean to the east.

Besides the port city to the east, there was no inhabited place within one hundred kilometers there. It was as if the creator of the world had, by mistake, placed Toatt Mining Town in the middle of nowhere.

There was only one reason a town would be created in this place.

It was because this place had a mine to dig out Books from.

Most people who lived in Toatt Mining Town were working to mine out Books and lived while being involved with Books. The town was supported by Books.

Toatt Mining Town was already bustling in the morning.

A herd of people exited their houses, headed for the mines.

Carrying their work tools such as pickaxes and hand drills in a knapsack on their shoulders, the bodies of the men who walked around town were ingrained by the smells of dust and machine oil.

They were heading down the mines to wade through the soil and rocks in order to look for Books. If they were to successfully dig out Books, they would be able to feast on some beer and smoked pork in the evening. And if they didn't find any Books, they would probably have to sip on some bean soup.

Most of the men walking around town were those kinds of people. Colio and the others were walking amongst this smell of machine oil and coals.

Tracks crossed the middle of town. Passing through them was a mine cart piled with coals. Four men were pushing the mine cart, headed towards the mountains.

From the opposite side a mine cart laden with Books came down screeching as it passed along the track.

The men pushing the carts were singing together.

"We are miners. Moles are our friends, and roots are our allies.

Is the mine heaven or hell? Scary Armed Librarians are behind us!

If we find the Book of that beloved girl,

Let us give her a kiss…"

The mine cart the man had been pushing passed Colio and the rest and disappeared.

The track led to a station at the town's entrance. The Books were then taken by train to the neighboring town, and from there a boat would take them to the Library.

Colio and the rest came to Toatt Mining Town using that train two days ago.

"Hey, what is that?"

Hyoue asked.

He was pointing towards a group of chimneys protruding from the mountainside.

Since they were far away, they couldn't see it very well, but they appeared to be very large chimneys. All of the chimneys emitted great amounts of grey smoke that covered the sky.

"What horrible smoke."

Hyoue said. Indeed, this town had the smell of ashes no matter where you went. As the sky became white, the whole town was dim.

"Inside the mines, they're burning a lot of coals. They dig with machines, looking for Books inside the soil."

Relia said.

“Can nothing be done about that smoke?”

“Who knows… probably, those Library people are too busy.”

Commented Relia.

A town of coals, steam engines, dust, smoke and Books.

This was Colio’s impression of Toatt Mining Town.

They went out of the main street into an alley.

A variety of shops lined up both sides of the narrow road.

Rye breads were displayed at the front of a bakery and old clothes and wooden shoes for the workers in the mountain were piled in front of a clothing store.

A small tavern offered things like soup and baked potatoes for the men who dug out Books. Many men there raised a commotion, stuffing their bellies while standing.

In front of them, peddlers were walking around with baskets, selling various items.

At the end of the road only beggars who couldn’t work at the mountains and playing children could be seen.

The three were aimlessly walking through this crowd.

“Hyoue, Colio.”

Said Relia who was walking in front.

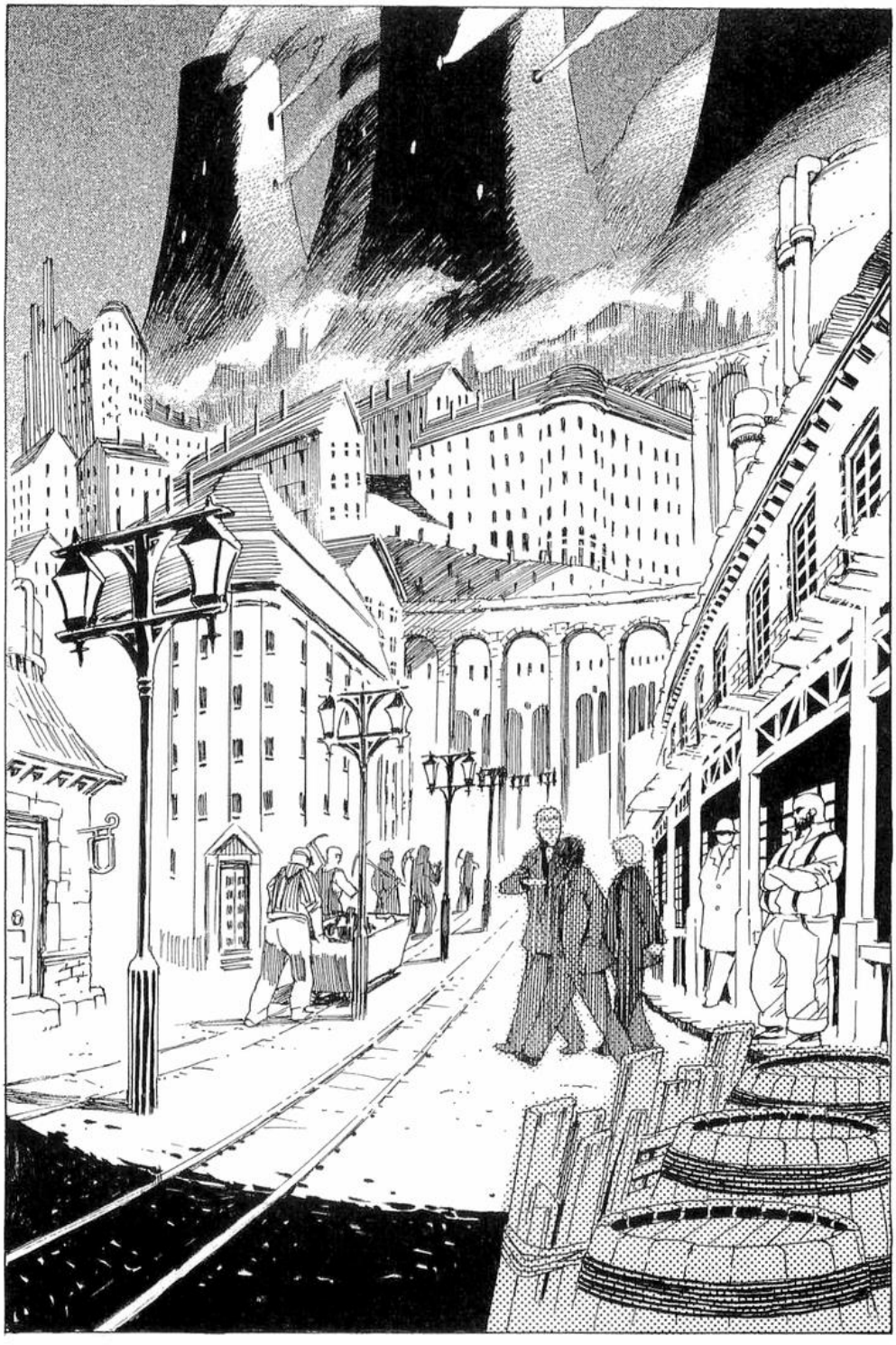
“Have you ever read a Book?”

Colio didn’t say anything. It was Hyoue who answered.

“No.”

“Me neither.”

Relia said this as he continued walking. Colio and Hyoue followed from behind.



“But, you might have read one long ago.”

“I might have, but I don’t know about it.”

Hyoue shook his head. Colio hadn’t said anything, but he thought the same as Hyoue. He had memories of only the past half year.

He woke up in the dark stone room, found out that he was a bomb, and learned that a bomb cannot gain happiness. Then, he came to this town the day before yesterday so he could kill Hamyuts Meseta.

He would kill Hamyuts in this town. Colio had nothing other than that goal. He met up with Relia and Hyoue on the train headed here.

“Hey, shall we chat for a bit?”

Relia suddenly said.

“…Huh?”

Colio replied.

“If we just shut up while walking, it would seem strange.”

“…That might be true.”

Colio looked around. Right now, he felt no signs of any people walking around town watching them.

But it might be bad for them to appear suspicious.

However, he couldn’t find a conversation topic. Killing Hamyuts Meseta – that was the only thing Colio knew of.

“What should we talk about?”

Colio asked, and Relia answered.

“Let’s talk about the Gods.”

“The Gods?”

“I heard a story about the Gods some time.”

Relia said this with a nostalgic tone.

“When was that?”

Hyoue asked.

“I don’t know. It was probably long ago.”

“Do you have memories which were not erased?”

Colio and Relia were surprised. Relia said while looking back,

“Don’t you have any?”

"…I don't."

Hyoue said.

"Me neither."

Colio answered.

"…I see."

Relia's face looked a bit lonely, but he didn't say anything more about that.

"Anyway, let's chat. So we can kill Hamyuts."

Said Colio.

"Right… where should I start from?"

Relia thought for a bit, and then started talking.

"I also forgot almost everything. Like where and when I've heard this.

I just still have some of my knowledge.

A long time ago, the Overseer of the Beginning and the End appeared in this world.

First, the Overseer of the Beginning and the End had used the chaos to create the sky, earth, and sea. This took about a million years.

Next, by molding the remaining chaos, he created animals and plants. This took about a hundred thousand years.

Then, by processing the remaining chaos, he created humans. This took ten thousand years.

At last, he cut his own body and created three separate Gods."

Relia kept talking. Hyoue and Colio listened without saying anything.

"The three Gods were entrusted with roles by the Overseer of the Beginning and the End. They divided the world into three parts, one for each.

The three were the Overseer of Those Yet to Come – Orntorra, the Overseer of Those Who Exist – Toitorra, and the Overseer of Those Who Have Passed – Bantorra.

The Overseer of the Beginning and the End left the world to the three new Overseers, and went into a long, long slumber. This was the birth of our world."

Relia continued the story.

"Past God Bantorra was left to oversee and record all the doings of humans.

For this purpose, Bantorra created a library. So that people wouldn't just enter it, he dug out an underground labyrinth and placed the library there.

That library remains even now, and is still active. It is the library known as Bantorra Library.

Then, Bantorra created the Books that would go inside.

Bantorra collected the souls of dead humans, and buried them underground. When souls are buried, they naturally lose their life force. And when their life force is depleted, the souls become fossilized.

The fossilized souls contain the entire memories of their owner. By touching the fossil, one can relive those memories.

Bantorra left the task of excavating Books to his Angel Librarians."

As Relia told this, a man who carried a basket full of Books passed next to him. It seemed that those were freshly excavated Books, as they were covered in dirt.

"Long ago, that time when Gods ruled men, was the Age of Paradise.

During the Age of Paradise there were no wars, no poverty nor crime – it was peaceful.

But, due to various incidents, the Gods were no longer next to men.

The overseeing of the world was left to the humans, and the Gods left this earth.

Out of the three overseeing Gods, the Past God Bantorra was sealed in the Director Room of the Library and never came out.

Therefore Bantorra entrusted the management of the Library to humans.

Since then, excavating "Books" and managing the Library became the work of humans.

The people Bantorra left the Library for became known as Armed Librarians."

"…Oh, I know that."

Hyoue said.

"To enter the Library's labyrinth you need to defeat the beasts protecting it, so Armed Librarians must possess extraordinary fighting ability besides having historical knowledge."

The most difficult profession to acquire in the world is an Armed Librarian.

Among the many Armed Librarians, the most powerful one becomes the Acting Director of Bantorra Library.

The both of you know her. It's Hamyuts Meseta."

Colio also knew about Hamyuts Meseta.

Throughout history only four women had occupied this world-leading post. Among the world's strongest warriors, she was the world's strongest killer.

"I know about this, Relia."

Hyoue said.

“I wonder why I know. I have no idea.”

“You don’t remember?”

“Yes. Because I’ve lost almost all of my memories.”

“Why do you remember just that?”

“I don’t know.”

Relia tilted his head. Colio who was silent until now opened his mouth.

“It’s fine.”

“…”

“More important than that, let’s kill Hamyuts Meseta.”

“…Right.”

By saying that, chat time was over. After that, nobody said anything.

Colio was slightly envious of Relia who kept a little of his memories.

But, even if he were to remember something, it wouldn’t help him kill Hamyuts. Since they existed only to kill Hamyuts Meseta, Relia was probably defective.

Thinking this, his gloominess cleared up a bit. His feelings were once again focused on killing Hamyuts Meseta.

Suddenly…

“You fellows have an interest in Books? You were talking about the Gods now.”

A voice called out to the three while they were walking.

It was a man at the end of the alley who spread out a cloth sheet on the ground. On top of the sheet dusty Books were arranged. Right now, that bearded man was beckoning towards Colio and the rest.

A Book seller.

“Won’t you have a look? It’s cheap.”

Said the Book seller. Colio stopped in his tracks.

It was the first time he had seen a Book.

Its appearance was like a small stone plate that could almost fit in his hand. The entire thing was a rectangle. But the “Books” offered here were missing parts, split apart or in little pieces.

“Come, come and see. These Books were excavated just yesterday. All of them are valuable.

You can enjoy them yourselves, or make a killing by selling them to the Library.

Come, come everyone, these are all first-class sealed goods."

The buying and selling of Books was prohibited, but it seemed the Book seller didn't care. He raised his voice towards the three.

"You fellows there who dress the same. Our Book store is for people just like you."

Colio and the rest tried to move away. The illegal Book seller was probably trying to make some easy money.

The "Book" dealer stood up and came closer. It seemed he had targeted Colio who was walking behind.

"Here, small boy. How about this Book?

It's a Book of one of the generals of the Imperial Age. I dug it out yesterday by my hands. I pulled out this little guy from the soil. If you think I'm trying to cheat you, have a look."

Relia turned around and talked to Colio.

"Colio. Ignore him. Let's go."

"Okay."

But the Book seller didn't give up.

"Don't say that, c'mon, have a look.

Or aren't you interested in generals?

Then how about this one?"

The Book seller tugged on Colio's clothes and showed him a Book. Colio turned to look at this Book held out by the man.

He didn't know why.

For just a moment, a small moment, he felt his eyes drawn towards that Book.

At first, the Book looked as if it was a plate made of half-transparent glass. Its form was a sharp triangle. It was a small fragment of a Book that could fit in his palm.

"A broken Book can show you only a little, but in exchange it's really cheap."

"Colio. What are you doing? Let's go."

The half-transparent Book was colored like snow. For some reason, Colio had felt a strange warmness from it. For some reason, he thought of it as a precious thing.

"If you touch it you'll be surprised. Here, what do you think? It's a valuable Book of a princess from three hundred years ago."

"Colio!"

Being told that, Colio turned around. He shook off the Book seller's hand and ran towards Relia and Hyoue.

"Hey kid, don't be so cruel to me."

The man had chased him. Blood rose to Colio's head.

Colio grabbed the knife inside his pants pocket.

He was a complete amateur in handling a knife, but Colio thought he could kill such an opponent easily.

Don't hinder me. I must kill Hamyuts Meseta.

And just as he thought so and was about to draw the knife…

"Hey. Do you have a permit from the Library?"

A man who had walked by suddenly grabbed the Book seller's hand.

It was a man about a head taller than the already somewhat tall Relia, so compared to Colio he didn't seem like a human. That suited man had a huge gun hanging from his waist. Colio could see some crest engraved on the gun's handle. The crest had the image of a lock.

"Yes, but I forgot it at home…"

"…Come with me."

The big man easily lifted the Book seller.

"No, it's true, really…"

The Book seller was attempting to bluff his way out of it, but the big man wouldn't even listen. He put the man on his shoulder and walked to the main road.

While watching the big man's back, Relia said.

"…That guy was an Armed Librarian."

"Huh?"

"The bronze lock represents the past, and indicates the God's agents. It's the emblem of the Armed Librarians."

"…You know a lot, Relia."

Hyoue was surprised.

"But, it wasn't Hamyuts Meseta, right?"

Asked Colio.

"Right. Hamyuts Meseta is a woman."

"So, he's irrelevant for us. We don't any interest in anyone other than Hamyuts Meseta."

Colio said. Relia still seemed to be thinking about something.

“Let’s go, Relia. We’ll kill Hamyuts Meseta.”

“Right. Let’s kill Hamyuts Meseta.”

“…Oh, fine.”

Once again, the three were lazily walking around.

After walking for a while, they passed the alleys.

From here on there we no stores or houses, just vacant lots on the outskirts of town. There was a wooden fence to signify the boundaries of the town. Scrap iron and wood, coals and cinders and all sorts of junk were cluttered around. Beyond this, there were only the grey mountains which continued endlessly.

“There’s nothing here.”

“Yeah.”

Saying this, the three stopped in their tracks, when suddenly a voice called from behind.

“Hahaha, you guys were in danger.”

The three turned around and saw the man talking to them.

It was a young man beaming with a natural smile. He held a wheelbarrow and came from the same direction as Colio and the rest. Inside the wheelbarrow was a mountain of bread, and next to it on a small barrel was a chunk of cheese with a knife stuck inside.

He seemed to be a bread seller. The wheelbarrow screeched as the young man drew closer to Colio’s group.

“You’re lucky. That old man always sells things no matter what. All the people of this neighborhood were his victims. Even though it’s not such a big deal.”

After saying this, the young man indicated the bread in his wheelbarrow.

“By the way, have you eaten lunch? My bread is delicious when freshly baked.”

The three looked at each other.

It certainly might have been the right time to eat their lunch.

The three leaned on the wood fence next to them. The young man pulled out the knife stuck in the cheese.

“Why do you three wear the same clothes?”

The young man said while inserting the knife into the bread.

He appeared to be around Relia's age. It seemed he was a good-natured youth. He was probably working ever since he was little, since he seemed proficient in handling the bread and cheese.

"There's no reason really."

Relia said with a shrug.

One piece of bread with cheese cost one kirue. A glass of ginger ale also cost one kirue. Relia took out a crumpled note of ten Kirue from his wallet, and in turn received four Kirue in coins.

The young man took the knife and with his agile hands cut the bread and cheese.

After a short while he passed the breads to the three, as well as poured them some ale from the barrel despite them not having asked for it.

The three started eating without saying anything.

"Pretty good for the price."

Relia said. It didn't seem to be mere flattery.

Colio didn't care. He just bit the bread and drank the ale.

"…Where's Hamyuts Meseta?"

Colio murmured. It seemed the bread-selling man didn't hear him.

"Hmm? Would you like some more ale? That would cost another kirue though."

Colio stood up and said,

"Tell us where Hamyuts Meseta is."

He approached him. The bread seller seemed surprised at his sudden strange words.

"Tell us."

As Colio was about to take out his knife, Relia grabbed his arm from behind.

"Ah, sorry. This guy's a bit strange.

Can you give me some more ale?"

"…Huh. Sure, thank you."

The young man put the kirue coin into his pocket and curiously looked at Colio.

"And, can I ask you something?"

"I don't mind."

The man seemed puzzled. He was probably thinking they were all strange guys.

"Do you know where Hamyuts Meseta is?"

“Where Hamyuts Meseta is?”

The young man returned Relia’s question.

“Where she is… Since she’s the Director of the Library, isn’t she there?”

“At Bantorra Library?”

“Yes. Don’t you know this?”

Relia scratched his head.

“Ah, I see, that’s right.”

The young man quizzically stared at Relia.

“Umm… excuse me, but what did you guys come here for?”

“Just a little sightseeing.”

“In this sort of place?”

“We’ve been interested in it for a long time.”

“…Hmm.”

The man tilted his head. As Colio thought, he was getting suspicious.

“But, if you wanted to sightsee, you should have bought a Book from that old man. Books really are interesting.”

“Ah, if we feel like it, we’ll do it.”

“Yeah, long ago even I got tricked by that old man and bought a Book. And that Book…”

The man suddenly stopped talking.

“What’s wrong?”

“What do mean, what’s wrong?”

He raised his finger to point at Hyoue who sat next to Relia.

“What’s wrong with him?”

Colio saw that both the bread and cup of ale had fallen to the ground. Hyoue threw his meal away and scratched at his chest.

“Haa, aah, aah, haah…”

He was scratching at the bomb inside his chest. If the vacuum tube would crack, it would be the end of him.

“Hyoue, you…”

“R-R-Relia, I was eating, eating, then…”

Colio's cup fell to the ground.

"Wait, s-save me, Relia, save me…"

Hyoue stood up and dragged his feet towards Relia.

Relia did not rush over to him. Instead, he turned around.

And he began running away with his back to Hyoue.

"Colio, escape, quickly!"

Relia cried, and Colio finally understood what was happening.

Colio threw away his bread and started running desperately, at full speed.

"You escape too!"

"Huh? Why?"

The bread seller alternated between Hyoue and Relia with a confused look.

Hyoue fell to his knees. He was trying to suppress the outside air from entering his vacuum tube by blocking the cracks with his fingers.

But a cracking sound could be heard from the vacuum tube that was under too much pressure.

"Relia, d-don't go, R-Relia…"

"What's wrong? You don't look good…"

"Colio, run a-"

The voices of Relia, Hyoue and the bread seller were all swallowed by an explosive roar. Colio collapsed as if pushed from behind.

His shoulder hit the ground and he somehow avoided the explosion. He received the hailing hot soil with his back, desperately protecting the bomb in his chest.

"R-Relia…"

"Colio, are you fine?"

As he called for Colio, voice had returned to their surroundings. Relia lay face down on the ground in front of the explosion, so he seemed to avoid the blast.

Looking back, at the center of the blackened earth, some small embers were left. The wood they had been sitting on before was raising smoke.

The corpse lying next to it probably belonged to the bread seller. His head and arms were blown to pieces.

Hyoue couldn't be seen anywhere. He became dust and vanished without a single trace remaining.

"…"

Colio watched this while absolutely stunned.

The alley started to become noisy. It seemed that people who heard the explosion were coming.

“Let’s run away, Colio.”

Colio and Relia ran in the opposite direction of the oncoming people. Since there were barely any people on this side, nobody had seen them.

After running a little, they started walking while trying to look innocent. Anyone running would appear suspicious, after all.

After walking for a while, the two stopped.

Relia turned and looked behind him. They were already far from the site of the explosion. People were walking through the main street as if nothing happened. They probably haven’t found out about the explosion yet.

“I wonder if we can relax here.”

Colio said. Relia didn’t say anything.

“What’s wrong, Relia?”

“Hey, what should we do?”

“About what?”

“What should we do? Should we cry? But I didn’t really know that guy enough to be crying for him. We’ve barely talked since we met.”

It was as Relia said. The three had met on their way to this town. There were only a few times they conversed with each other.

“What should we do, Colio?”

Colio thought for a bit, and then answered.

“Let’s kill Hamyuts Meseta.”

“Why should we do that?”

“Forget that guy. We’ll kill Hamyuts Meseta.”

Relia struck the wall with his fist.

“…You’re right, but…”

“It’s the same whatever we do. We’ll kill Hamyuts Meseta with this bomb in our chests, and die.”

“…That’s right, but!”

Relia struck the wall once more. It shook a little, and his fist became covered in blood.

“But…”

Relia went silent after saying this.

For a while, both Colio and Relia stood there without saying anything.

Some time had passed.

When the sky was starting to become red, Relia spoke.

“Hey, Colio. Have you ever wondered?”

“Wondered about what?”

“Don’t you want to know the reason?”

“The reason for what?”

“Why must we kill Hamyuts Meseta no matter what?”

Relia said while touching the bomb in his chest.

“I don’t know.”

Colio answered.

“Who were the ones who gave us this command? Who were the ones who took our memories and put bombs inside of us?”

“I have no idea. I’ll kill Hamyuts Meseta.”

“…But why…”

“I’ll kill Hamyuts Meseta.”

Relia’s face grimaced as he touched his chest.

“I’ll kill…”

“That’s enough.”

Relia finally went silent.

“I’ll kill Hamyuts Meseta.”

Relia didn’t reply.

“Let’s get back.”

Colio said. Relia started walking without saying anything.

Colio didn’t know why he needed to kill Hamyuts Meseta.

He also didn’t know who ordered him to kill her.

He also didn’t know whether they belonged to some organization.

But he didn’t wonder about that.

Colio thought it was fine.

He was proud of himself for being like that.

A bomb doesn’t question anything.

A bomb doesn't have any curiosity.

When he’ll kill Hamyuts Meseta, he’ll die as well.

That was the meaning of being a bomb.

He thought of himself as a proper bomb, an excellent bomb.

I'm not a human.

I’m a bomb.

Colio lived while thinking only this.

Chapter 2: A Bomb, a Princess, and Various People

Colio and Relia returned to the inn.

It seemed that no-one connected them with the explosion that happened on the outskirts of town yet.

There were no visitors or people observing them there.

Colio and Relia sat down on their beds quietly.

“It seems Hamyuts Meseta is at the Library. Colio, what are we going to do?”

Colio answered without hesitating.

“We were told to kill Hamyuts Meseta here. So we will kill her here.”

“…Right.”

Saying this, Relia slipped into his bed.

“I’ll go to sleep.”

Colio didn’t reply.

He wondered if Relia was really sleeping or just lying on his bed. Either way, it didn’t matter to him.

“…Hmm?”

Sitting on his bed, Colio suddenly noticed there was something in his pants pocket.

Turning around, he noticed a piece of a transparent stone was peeking from his back pocket. It was a Book. Where did he get such a thing? With a start, Colio realized.

“…Oh, right.”

That illegal Book seller probably put it in his pocket without permission.

He was probably planning on charging him money for that. Colio took the Book out, thinking about throwing it away.

Colio didn’t know that the stored memories will flow into whoever touches a Book. These stored memories would be replicated inside the recipient’s mind.

That was the state known as “reading a Book”.

If a Book is touched without any gloves on, it will be “read” on the spot.

The scenery in front of Colio’s eyes completely changed.

That surprising moment couldn’t be described with words.

He was seeing a landscape that should not have existed and the feel of his dingy bed was replaced by the caress of the wind.

Colio had lost his body inside the “Book”. Only his eyes, ears and skin still remained.

He could view the landscape from every angle, and hear every sound from up close.

Colio thought this was like having a dream.

It was dusk time inside the Book.

Beyond the gentle hills that continued on and on, Colio could see the sinking sun with his eyes that did not exist.

“Why?”

It was a man’s coarse voice.

“I don’t have a reason.”

It was a slender woman’s voice.

“Everything has to end.”

“Why?”

“You, who during fifty whole years offered yourself to fighting and continuously got stronger without a moment’s rest, will lose to me, one with arms as thin as this violet’s stem. But no matter how unreasonable this is, I don’t have any reason.”

“…W-why…”

“Shlamuffen. The Ever-Laughing Magic Blade.”

There was the sound of a sword thin as a wire being swung down. Then the sound of air leaking resounded from the man’s lungs.

At dusk, a lone man had fallen down, and a lone woman stared at him sadly. The man’s hand was firmly clenching an iron spear.

The figures of those two at dusk became redder and redder – looking as if they were going to become burning ashes.

The woman spoke while looking down at the man’s corpse.

“These are all poor people.”

As she said this, she swung the thin sword once. The blood that stuck to the blade scattered around. A little spurt hit her white gloves.

Her silk gloves that extended to her elbows and the long skirt of her regal dress were white as a cloud floating in a crystal-clear sky. And just like a cloud, she was dyed by the light of sunset.

Even the wide brimmed hat she put on her head was white. The hat was decorated with genuine white lily flowers that were encased in wax.

The woman's face was hidden by the hat and only her nose and below it could be seen.

Colio remembered the Book seller said it was a Book from three hundred years ago.

During that time there were no machines or guns, and so it was an era when horses, swords, and Magic held the leading roles of the world.

Rather than establishments like the people's congress or republic governments, it was an era when kings, nobles and knights had ruled the world.

During that era, much more Magic had been developed.

In modern times, the power of machinery was much more convenient, so Magic was becoming obsolete. For people living normally, there was almost no chance to meet any Magician. Magicians could only be found among people such as special engineers or the Armed Librarians.

But, during that era there were numerous powerful Magicians.

Colio thought that perhaps this woman was a Magician.

"Here, have a look."

The woman said. Colio realized her voice was surprisingly young. It was the voice of someone who could be called a girl, around his age or a little above it.

The girl held up the sword in her right hand in front of her.

It was a strange sword.

Its handle was shaped like a spider. It even had delicate eight legs resting on the girl's hand. The jointed spider legs tore into the girl's silk gloves and dyed her fingers with blood.

The blade protruded from the spider's rear. It was modeled after a spider's thread, and was similarly as thin.

The girl started talking.

"This sword is the Ever-Laughing Magic Blade – Shlamuffen. It is one of the seven remaining Memorial Weapons in this world. Among the remaining seven, it is said to be the most inconsiderate and bloodthirsty.

These Memorial Weapons were the weapons used by the Gods during the long past Paradise Era. This Shlamuffen was used as a weapon by the punishment enforcers among the Librarian Angels."

There was no one to reply to the girl's words. Still, she kept speaking.

"This Memorial Weapon is cursed to be eternal due to having the Gods' powers. I cannot break it, and neither can anyone of this world.

Even if I were to throw the sword away, it would surely find a new owner to replace me. Please forgive my powerlessness."

The blade of the sword – Ever-Laughing Magic Blade Shlamuffen – had smoothly withdrawn into its handle.

“By the way, would you like to hear my story?”

As the girl said this, she took off her hat and threw it away. Her hair was spread and casually fluttered down to her back like a butterfly.

It was a strange hair. Its color was hard to describe.

The entirety of it was chestnut-colored. However, some parts of it were white and some black, forming a striped pattern. It was like the color of a calico cat’s fur.

The girl’s hair danced in the gentle wind.

She turned her vivacious and gentle face towards the red light and closed her eyes.

Her expression was sad yet beautiful.

“It has been 18 years since I’ve obtained this power. Compared to the number of people I’ve saved, the number of people I’ve hurt is much larger.

Even though there was really no need for anyone to be hurt.”

Who was this girl talking to? Colio thought.

“While hurting, regretting, and blaming myself for taking people’s lives, I haven’t found any meaning.

I haven’t offered my hand to suffering people and suffered from my sins inside a dark room.

While hurting others, I was even more afraid of hurting myself.

Pursuing wealth, succumbing to greed.

Selfishness. Avarice. Cowardice. Sloth.

Those were all my sins.

I wonder if you pity me.

Or are you looking down at me?

I don’t mind either way.

I just want to be with you.

Even if we’re far apart, as long as my fragments are by your side, it’s enough for me. Yes, it’s enough.”

The girl began walking.

“When my words reach you…

Please go to the place where a precious person lost someone precious to them. What you were seeking for a long time will weigh on your back.

For a brief moment, the wind will stop.

Please run without hesitating then.

Yes, me too. I also… yes, thank you. I really do. It makes me happy."

She said this with small intervals between sentences.

"I have been called by many names, both now and in the future. The Nation's Saint. The Ever-Laughing Witch. Even something such as "Tortoiseshell". But as expected, I want to be called by my real name."

The girl appeared to be smiling for a moment. That slight smile was probably out of embarrassment.

Dusk was soon replaced by a curtain of indigo.

A crescent moon had already been floating in the sky since a while ago.

As if the world itself had been cut off, Colio was pulled back to reality.

He was inside a room, on top of a bed.

He wondered how much time had passed.

Colio was still in the position of having tried to take the Book fragment out of his back pocket. It was already dark outside, and the lady managing the inn was taking the laundry inside.

Colio stretched the sleeve of his shirt and held the Book like that. This time nothing happened.

Colio was staring intently at the Book. His heart was throbbing.

That girl's sad smile left a deep impression on him.

Colio looked around. He was restless and couldn't calm down.

He rose up pacing around the room, feeling as if something significant had happened and that he had to do something about it right away.

"Why is that…?"

Colio muttered, intently staring at the Book placed on his bed.

It was a strange Book. He couldn't understand what he has seen - such as whom the girl was talking to. It was really too strange to be just a monologue.

Thinking about it, he had no idea what her name was. She said she wanted to be called by her real name, but he didn't know it. However, he did mention some of her nicknames. The Nation's Saint. The Ever-Laughing Witch. Tortoiseshell. Each of them gave a different feel. Tortoiseshell was especially awful.

What should I call her?

Colio pondered.

Tortoiseshell-colored-hair Princess. It was too long, and didn't sound good.

Tortoiseshell-haired Princess. Still too long.

The Calico-haired Princess. Calico Princess. Yes, that was good.

"Calico Princess."

He tried saying it out loud.

Just by naming her, he suddenly felt as if they grew closer.

Colio put the Book inside the very bottom of his bag.

Relia was sleeping. It seemed like he hadn't noticed anything.

Some time had passed. Relia didn't wake up yet.

Colio decided having dinner by himself. He went to the dining room on the first floor of the inn. Right now, only Colio's group was at this cheap inn.

Inside a narrow room at the front of the inn, there was a wooden desk. This seemed to be the dining room. Colio sat there in silence.

The innkeeper was gossiping with some neighbors. When Colio came, the women immediately looked at him and started speaking.

"Boy, do you know anything?"

"…About what?"

Colio asked back. Looking at their faces, it was apparent something had happened. Since he wasn't sure if this was about Hyoue, he became anxious.

If they were found out here, it would be hard for them to kill Hamyuts Meseta.

But what the old lady talked about wasn't related to Hyoue.

"It seemed there was some commotion this afternoon. An Armed Librarian was apparently killed."

"Hamyuts Meseta?"

Hearing about an Armed Librarian, Colio immediately responded without thinking. Hamyuts Meseta was the only Armed Librarian he knew.

"Of course not. It was one of her subordinates, umm, what was he called… ah, Luimon. It was Luimon."

Luimon. He heard that name for the first time. One of Hamyuts Meseta's subordinates. Colio thought that it might have been the big man he saw earlier.

"How did it happen?"

“I don’t know, but they say it was a bomb.”

Colio’s heart jumped for a moment. Fortunately he didn’t show it on his face.

The women didn’t intend to gossip with him. They just wanted to share their speculations among themselves.

He was given a dish of grilled meat with bread and soup, and began eating alone.

Outside of the window, people were hurriedly moving through the town at dusk. In this dust-filled town, the dusk was just dusty.

The sun, sinking behind the mountains in the west, didn’t dye the grey dusk with even a single drop of red.

This town was dim.

The smoke coming from the mines covered the entire town.

Colio recalled the dusk he had seen inside the Book and felt as if he had realized how dim the town was only now.

As he scooped up soup with his spoon, Colio watched the sunset dumbfounded.

Colio daydreamed about the color of the sun in the other side of the grey-colored sky. He didn’t understand why he felt this way.

A little while before that…

It was a bit after the death of Hyoue Janfus and the bread selling young man.

The Armed Librarian called Luimon Mahaton was walking through the town during midday.

Luimon was a large man. His muscles were like armor. His thighs were as thick as logs. His bursting flesh was wrapped by a grey business suit and a well-ironed shirt.

With just the clothes, he looked like a salary man you could find anywhere. However, his body and the huge gun hanging from his waist clearly distinguished him from a normal person. And on that gun’s handle was carved a crest that every person in the world knew belonged to the Armed Librarians.

Luimon shook his gun as he walked from the path back from the mine. He just handed over the illegal Book seller to this town’s sheriff. He was probably being reprimanded right now.

Luimon believed that the trafficking of Books should be handled more aggressively. Books could not be replicated after all. If they weren’t placed under the Library’s care, they would just become lost.

That being said, the trafficking of Books was unrelated to his current job. *I must concentrate on my present job,* Luimon thought.

Luimon entered the tavern that also served as a restaurant, deciding to have his lunch.

He took out a silver watch from his breast pocket to check the time. It was exactly 12 o'clock. A good time for a meal.

Luimon sat at the counter and put a ten kirue bill on top of it.

"Give me a chicken steak and some corn salad."

"What should I add to that?"

"Fried… no, mashed potatoes. A large amount."

Luimon's large body moved to a small table next to the counter.

"Is this enough?"

"No, even more than that."

Looking at Luimon's body, the host spoke in an amazed voice while cooking.

"You sure are large, mister, but I wonder just how much."

Luimon immediately replied.

"Sixteen lyra and half a laary. Twenty one and a third tohora."

"Uh, can you say that in metric?"

"Umm…"

Luimon calculated inside his head. One laary was about two centimeters, and every lyra was six laarys, so multiplying that by twelve is 193. One machi is fifteen grams, times seven for one matan, and seven of that times seven to get a tohora…

"About 193 centimeters and 110 kilograms."

"Ah, so much."

Looking at him, the man was surprised.

Recently, the metric system that was devised by the scientific community became mainstream over the old traditional lyra units. But it wasn't like Luimon had a problem understanding the decimal multiplication of the metric system over multiplying by six or seven with the lyra system.

The lyra system was simply more convenient for those who use Magic, but that probably didn't matter for normal people.

"Here you go."

As he was thinking about this matter, his meal had arrived. Just as he saw it, his stomach rumbled.

"Thanks for the food."

Luimon thrust his fork at the pile of mashed potatoes.

Suddenly, he felt some killer intent.

Luimon's body became tense, and prepared for combat.

"…"

However, Luimon hadn't moved. He didn't want to give the enemies behind him a chance.

While loading his mouth with mashed potatoes, he was gloating inside his mind.

That was because the enemies had eliminated the need to search for them. His job was in a long stalemate, but it seemed that there would be some progress now.

"Mmm, delicious."

The enemies he could feel behind him were amateurs. They were probably two or three people. They were about to attack.

Soon, Luimon thought while cutting the steak.

They came at him.

And then…

Luimon's hand separated itself from the knife, and as if it was an independent living creature, grabbed the gun at his waist.

Luimon opened the rifle's shortened barrel with his right hand.

The bayonet attached to the tip of the gun glistened with oil. By that time, he was able to grasp the situation.

With the experience ingrained in his body, Luimon was able to accurately move the way he needed to.

"Hah…"

The bayonet emitted a high-pitched metallic sound and his right elbow made a thud. A knife fell from a man's hand, and a woman's body collapsed.

Switching the hand holding the gun by turning his wrist, he struck the solar plexus of the guy as he tried to pick up his knife with the gun's handle.

All of this was done as a single action. He didn't hesitate or stop for a second.

The woman lost her consciousness with a single blow, and the man collapsed with vomit flying from his mouth.

"A-aah…"

By the time the owner was screaming, the work was already over. Luimon fastened the gun to his waist. And just as he was thinking how to explain the situation…

Luimon's life had ended.

Behind the woman, a child's figure broke the vacuum tube in his chest and ended his life without Luimon even seeing him. Without any time to even feel pain, his brain had ceased all activity.

The blast coming from behind Luimon crushed his large body. His dead body was further blown to smithereens by the resulting explosions of the bombs in the other two.

The three bombs held enough destructive power to destroy the entire place as well as half of a nearby house. Both the witnesses and Luimon's targets inside the tavern were completely obliterated.

As if lagging behind, a roar resounded outside.

It was that day's night.

Relia opened his eyes and noticed that Colio wasn't in the room.

He heard some sort of rustling sound before, but he didn't know anything apart from that.

He raised his body and rubbed his puffy eyes. It seemed this town's dusty air wasn't good for them.

Inside his bed, Relia recalled long past events – the things he talked about with Hyoue and the rest, as well as various other things.

Relia had some of his memories left. Since Colio and Hyoue barely knew anything, he was probably the exception.

But even he couldn't remember very much.

He couldn't remember his childhood.

Memories of his mother and father, memories of his family, memories of him being breastfed or walking for the first time…

He didn't have any of those.

His first memory was a stone room.

He remembered feeling cold when his knees and head touched the floor. His first memory was him crouching on that stone floor.

There were people around – twelve or thirteen of them. The next time he counted, they were twenty seven. All of them were sitting down on the stone floor.

Relia and the rest had been imprisoned inside this stone room.

Both children and adults, men and women, were lumped together in the room. At that time Relia knew how to stand up and walk, look around him, and speak.

He was probably around ten years old then.

Where was he before entering his room and why was he here? He had no memories to answer that. Were his memories lost or erased? He didn't know whether he was always there or just brought inside from another place. Although he asked the people around, none of them knew or even tried to understand their situation.

It was a strange room. None of the people had any work to do, and they just lazily lay around. Their only meals were breadcrumbs thrown on the ground. Some of them just sat silently on the floor, some banged their heads against the walls while murmuring to themselves, and some were playing around with imaginary dices while gambling imaginary money.

He had no sense of the date, time of the week, or hour.

They were clothed livestock.

This was the only thing apparent to Relia and the rest.

Relia didn't know about Colio and Hyoue, but he imagined they had the same circumstances of staying inside such a room filled with clothed livestock.

A long time had passed without anything happening.

Relia was almost mentally broken countless times. He also considered suicide.

But, for some reason, he was able to preserve his sanity.

Probably ten years have passed. A lone man came for Relia and took him out of the room.

And he led Relia to another room.

While they were moving, he could see the ocean from a window in the corridor.

Inside the room he was brought to, there were several white-wearing men. Whether they were doctors or Magicians, Relia couldn't tell the difference.

"What are you?"

One of them said.

"…A human."

Relia answered.

"You're wrong. You aren't a human."

"Why?"

"Do you even know what humans are?"

Relia didn't answer.

"I'll teach you."

The white robed man took a rope, tied it around Relia and rolled him on the floor.

"…We just need to pass it to Crukessa?"

"Yes. We won't be able to use it later."

"I see. What will happen if it'll break?"

"We'll just use it as bait."

The men were talking about such things while looking down at Relia.

"Hey, who exactly are you?"

"Hehe, if you'd like to know, we'll tell you…"

"We're from the Indulging God Cult."

"What is that?"

Relia asked, and a man answered.

"I can't answer that simply. We need to talk about it somewhere."

"…I've wanted to talk since the start."

"So, this is related to the story of the Gods."

Saying this, the man began telling the story of the Overseer of the Beginning and the End, the story of the world's creation, the story of the world's Overseers, and the story of Bantorra and the Armed Librarians.

From there on, Relia's memories were fuzzy.

When he opened his eyes, there was a bomb inside his chest.

What were they talking about?

He couldn't recall.

Thinking about it, he wondered what Colio was doing. Maybe he was eating dinner? But it was late for that.

"Now might be my only opportunity."

Relia muttered aloud.

After finishing dinner, Colio went out for a walk.

It's not like he had something to do outside, but he didn't feel like talking with Relia.

The ones who killed Luimon Mahaton were probably Colio and the rest's allies. Colio thought of this while walking. It might have been someone he met before.

Just like Colio, they were probably people told that they weren't human.

"…Human."

Inside the town where lamps were being lit up here and there, Colio muttered.

That Luimon Mahaton person was definitely not a human as well.

If he was a human, he wouldn't have been hurt. Hurting humans was unforgivable. Humans lived to be happy, to love, to be loved.

Therefore, a person who was hurt, who was unhappy, was not a human.

He may have had the shape of a human, but on a more fundamental level he was a different, trifling existence.

Thus Colio thought.

Children were running on the road.

Seeing this didn't give him any reminiscence or warm feelings. It also did not make him involuntarily smile. He was just staring emotionlessly at the children. Colio didn't know what "having fun" was like.

Colio thought it was the proof he wasn't human.

Hamyuts Meseta also wasn't a human. If she were a human, she wouldn't have to be killed.

He had no idea about the children in front of him. They might be humans, and they might not be.

The children were running around looking for some lost cat through the holes in walls and trees.

Colio thought…

Was that Calico Princess a human?

Thinking for a moment, Colio was sure that she was.

When he recalled her beautiful and noble figure, he couldn't think of her as not being a human.

As the sun already sank, lamps were lit up throughout the town. Winged small insects were drawn to the dim light of these gas lamps. The light reached all the way to the back alleys, making the town a bit brighter rather than dark grey.

Colio was walking in the opposite direction of the crowd of people returning from the mines. His legs led him to the alley he went to earlier that day. He didn't understand why. Maybe it was because this was the only road he knew here.

The town that had been sleeping in the morning was now awake.

From a small lit tavern, the miners' laughter, singing and sometimes yelling could be heard.

The smells of dust and oil covering the town were now mixed with the smell of hard liquor.

Colio, who was walking aimlessly among the herd of people, suddenly looked at a lone girl. The girl was sitting in the dark at the end of the road, as if trying to escape the gas lamps.

The girl was motionless. She was looking at her legs or doing something – Colio couldn't tell.

He stopped to stare at the girl's figure. The other people walked by without paying her any attention. Their shoulders bumped into Colio and nearly made him stumble.

"…It's already impossible."

The girl said suddenly.

"Everything came out."

Saying this, she stood up and rubbed her eyes. Colio saw her face.

Her eyes were red as if covered by blood. Around them were dark marks from having wiped them over and over again.

"So people can actually run out of tears. Haha, I had no idea."

The girl laughed. It was laughter without any emotion in it, apparent only by her voice and expression.

"Are you from around here?"

The girl said.

"…"

Colio didn't say anything.

"Hey, are you from around here?"

"…"

"…Listen, I'm talking to you."

Colio then understood she was talking to him.

He couldn't understand why she would do that. Colio just stood there without answering.

"You're weird."

The girl stared at Colio's face. So inevitably, Colio also looked at her face. Those two faced each other under the dim lights.

She had a normal face. It couldn't be called beautiful or ugly. She was wearing a white cotton cape on top of her white cheap dress. It was probably worn not because it was fashionable, but due it being cold. She was a plain, completely normal girl.

Her appearance didn't move Colio's emotions either. The only thing he thought about was how red her eyes and the tips of her nose were.

She also seemed to be unmoved by his appearance. He was simply a short boy.

"I have a question for you."

"…What?"

"Oh, you finally said something."

The girl smiled a little.

"Do you know what to do when the person you love dies?"

"Who knows?"

"…I guess, huh..."

Saying this, the girl crouched again. Then, she began sobbing in front of Colio.

After a while, she stopped crying.

"…Thank you. That was good for me. I feel better after having talked with someone, no matter who it is."

She said while sobbing. Colio wasn't by her side out of kindness, but simply because he had no place to go to. Colio didn't understand how he made her feel better.

"…What are you doing?"

The girl stood up while saying this.

"…"

Colio determined there was no reason to tell this girl about killing Hamyuts Meseta. But after thinking about what he wanted to do, he almost couldn't think of anything else to answer.

"I'm thinking about humans."

"How sophisticated."

Colio didn't really understand what she meant by this.

He then asked.

"Was that person who died a human?"

"Of course. Is there a person who's not human? A Magical Angel? A Librarian Angel? Or some ancient God? You've read too much fairytales."

He didn't really understand what she was saying. So Colio tried to inquire further.

"Humans are supposed to live while being loved."

“Right. I loved him. I really loved him.”

“…I see.”

The conversation wasn’t really flowing, Colio thought.

“What’s your name?”

The girl asked. Colio decided he didn’t mind answering.

“Colio Tonies.”

“Such a normal name. I also have a normal name. Ia Mira.”

Ia Mira said while wiping her eyes.

“He also had a normal name.

Cartohelo Mashea. His job was selling bread on the roads.”

“…Eh?”

Colio responded.

“Do you know Cartohelo?”

“…No, I don’t.”

Colio then understood that the person this girl – Ia Mira – was mourning was the bread-selling young man killed by Hyoue’s explosion.

He tried recalling that guy’s face.

But, he could only remember it vaguely.

“You were thinking about humans, right?”

Ia Mira said. Colio nodded.

“Why are you thinking about humans? Aren’t you a human? Are you thinking about yourself?”

“…I’m not a human.”

Saying this, Colio was suddenly grabbed by his wrist. He was surprised to the extent that his heart skipped a beat.

Applying her fingers to Colio’s wrist, Ia Mira then spoke in an anticlimactic manner.

“Huh, you do have a pulse. I’m surprised; I actually thought you weren’t a human.”

Ia said while releasing his hand.

“You are a human. Good.”

Ia seemed to be speaking lively. However, Colio understood she was only doing this to conceal her emotions.

“I’m not a human. Humans are…”

At that moment, the figure of Calico Princess vividly rose inside his mind. He recalled the impact and deep impression he felt during that moment as well as the beauty of the sunset.

“…Simply too different.”

“…Hmph.”

While Ia seemed to be talking normally, when her words became stuck, she would show a momentary glimpse of a sad expression. Seeing that, Colio wondered if Cartohelo was human. Did he live while loving, being loved and happy – meaning he was a human?

“Tell me about Cartohelo.”

Colio said. Ia looked Surprised.

“Why?”

“…Just because.”

“You’re so strange. That’s the first time you said something like that.”

“Anything will be fine. Just tell me something.”

Ia still looked a bit confused regarding Colio, but started speaking.

“I was the first to fall in love with him. It was love at first sight. Hey, do you believe in love at first sight?”

“No.”

He didn’t care. Ia continued.

“Love at first sight exists.

But, people who don’t believe in love at first sight don’t notice it. They realize only later that they have fallen in love.

I was also like that. When I was looking for Cartohelo in places he couldn’t be in and thought about what I was doing, I realized it. I’ve fallen in love at first sight.”

“…I see.”

He was not deliberately ignoring her, but he wasn’t seriously listening to her either. Colio made an ambiguous reply.

“Cartohelo had no father and was living alone with his mother. But his mother also died at the time, and since he was working so hard for her, he lost all of his motivation. That’s when I met him by chance.”

She then continued talking about her memories of Cartohelo. They didn't know each other for too long. Ia was one year younger than him, and they were dating for about two years and a half.

While Cartohelo was the one to begin speaking with her, it was Ia who confessed to him.

The two were not married yet, but they planned on getting married when their lives became a bit more stable. Ia said that if they were to work hard until the next year's summer, they would be able to gather enough money to open a shop together. The both of them knew they were not very smart. They also didn't go to school. But Ia was happy to have Cartohelo more than someone who was just smart and had some money.

To sum up, Ia Mira and Cartohelo Mashea were two extremely average people who met and fell in love in an average manner. Even the drama born between them and the happiness and hard times they obtained were extremely average.

Colio listened to Ia Mira's story while just staring at her.

There were countless things to tell of. But time was limited.

Unlike Colio who had nothing to do, Ia presumably had a job and a lot of things she had to do.

Ia, who had been talking while crouched down, stood up and said,

"…Well, I'm going to work. Even if Cartohelo's gone I have to work, and I have to earn money to live."

"Right."

"Goodbye."

Saying this, the two easily parted ways.

The time was midnight. He could roughly guess what sort of job would start at this sort of time in the entertainment district. Even the ignorant Colio could understand that. However, he didn't really care about such things.

"Was she a human…?"

He couldn't reach a conclusion. It was too vague for him, so he left the question hanging inside his mind.

A weak wind was blowing.

Far away from Toatt Mining Town, close to the sea on the other side of the world, there was an island.

It wasn’t a large island. Its shape was a perfect circle like inside a compass. It was an island without any forests or caves, just numerous gentle hills.

On the hill at the center of the island was a huge castle surrounded by high walls.

It was an old-fashioned castle made by white bricks. Just how long has it been since it was built? Tangled ivy reached all the way to the huge castle’s spires. The sunlight dyeing the castle was soft. Both the sky and the wind seemed to lively applaud their creator. This castle stood on the hill, looking like it came out of an incredible oil painting.

That castle’s name was Bantorra Library. It was the world’s first library, built long ago by the Overseers of the world to accommodate the pasts of all people.

The castle and building on the surface were built by humans for the use of Armed Librarians and visitors. The real Library was a vast labyrinth spread beneath the castle. However, details of the labyrinth will have to wait for another opportunity.

In the center of the castle’s top floor, there was a wide room of about 30 square meters.

A vintage painting was hanging on the wall. It was a large portrait depicting the old days of the Creator deity and the Overseer of the Past. The emblem of a lock had been woven into the center of a high-quality yet weathered white carpet.

A woman was at the center of the room.

“Aah…”

The woman tapped her shoulders while saying this.

“I want to kill them already.”

The woman said to herself.

“What are Luimon and the rest doing? If they won’t hurry we'll have to kill randomly.”

The woman said such horrible things calmly. Her tone didn’t indicate any sort of joke.

She was a strange woman. It was unclear if she was or wasn’t in her thirties.

She wore a washed-out shirt and men’s pants. She was a terribly plain woman dressed in rustic clothes. Apart from a black ribbon tying her dark hair and the figure of a rabbit clumsily sewn to her shirt’s right breast, she had no accessories. She also wore no makeup.

She was a plain woman you would expect to see in some rural town’s garden. She was one you would definitely overlook in a crowd of people even if you were searching for her.

But, because she was so simple and commonplace, it looked extremely strange for her to be inside this gorgeous room.

The woman was writing something while facing the small desk at the center of the room.

On the desk were several papers, several Books, and next to them a glass of milk and a pen stand. Another strange thing was the bundle of five stones lying on top of the desk. The crest of the Armed Librarian was engraved on each one.

This woman was known as Hamyuts Meseta.

Hamyuts Meseta, the Acting Director of Bantorra Library.

“You may enter.”

Hamyuts suddenly opened her mouth.

She spoke with a scruffy tone, extending the ending of her words in a weird way.

There was no-one inside the room.

But soon, she heard a voice from the other side of the door.

“Third-Grade Armed Librarian Mirepoc Finedell, entering.”

The door was opened following this clear female voice. A girl wearing what looked like a military uniform entered. She stood in front of Hamyuts’ desk stretching her slender back and aligning the heels of her shoes.

Her lemon-like blonde hair was cut short, and her face divided by the bridge of her nose was as stiff as that of a well-trained hound. Her uniform was fully buttoned up to the top, and there was not even one wrinkle on it. She looked like a superb soldier. A pendant engraved with the crest of the Armed Librarians was shining on her chest. Incidentally, because there were no regulations about the location of the mark, each Armed Librarian could decide for themselves where to put it.

“Since you went out of your way to come here, I assume you have some bad news.”

Hamyuts said. Mirepoc Finder nodded in silence. She puckered her lips, staring with strong and determined eyes at Hamyuts who was still in the midst of writing.

“Indeed. It is the worst news.”

“What could have happened?”

“Luimon-san is dead.”

Even hearing this, Hamyuts didn’t change her expression. She wasn’t angry or smiling, just meek and expressionless. It was a calm expression with no emotions behind it, like one had while reading a novel that wasn’t really interesting.

While hearing about the death of her subordinate, not even her eyebrows twitched.

Mirepoc continued the report.

“It happened during noon at Toatt Mining Town… at a tavern in the town. He was killed by bombs… which are presumably human bombs.

Since during that afternoon another bombing incident occurred, I believe the possibility of enemy forces being in Toatt Mining Town is high and I suggest that we immediately send some troops there.”

"…"

Hamyuts didn't raise her face. Even though she appeared to be thinking, she also looked like she was absorbed in her writing.

It was hard for Mirepoc to talk to her. She didn't know any other person whose emotions were so hard to read, so she couldn't tell if Hamyuts was thinking about something or not thinking at all. Mirepoc resumed her report.

"Right now, including me there are four Third-Grade Armed Librarians ready for a sortie. If you'll give the instructions, Acting Director, we'll be able to depart within the hour."

"Stop that."

Hamyuts said calmly.

"…Huh?"

Mirepoc responded without thinking. Hamyuts grabbed the cup of delicious milk besides her and took a sip.

"Kids should stay inside and study. You'll have a fun fieldtrip another time."

"Director!"

Mirepoc hit the desk without thinking.

A little milk was spilled on the desk, and Hamyuts wiped it with her sleeve.

"What are you planning to do? We need to avenge Luimon-san!"

"Avenge?"

"Because Luimon-san…"

Hamyuts raised her eyes for the first time, looking at Mirepoc's face. Her eyes looked like she was laughing, but her expression didn't. Those terrifying eyes didn't allow reading what she was thinking at all.

"I'm pretty sure I've taught you to separate killing from personal feelings. So you didn't listen to me, huh Mirepo?"

"No, that's…"

Mirepoc took her words back. She had neither the authority nor the intention to defy Hamyuts.

"…So, what are we going to do?"

Hamyuts suddenly stood up.

With her sandals shaking, she headed towards the door close to Mirepoc. While walking, she said,

“I have a question for you, Mirepo. Among our troops that can be mobilized immediately…”

Hamyuts stopped and turned around.

“Who’s the best one at ‘massacring’?”

Mirepoc answered.

“Acting Director Hamyuts Meseta.”

Hamyuts who was turned towards Mirepoc grinned.

“That’s right.”

It was then that Mirepoc understood why Hamyuts was so calm.

Contrary to her plain appearance and words, Hamyuts Meseta was said to be the most aggressive God’s representative in history.

She always preferred going alone for a pre-emptive attack. She didn’t allow the enemy any demands or deals, and a battle resulting in her not having massacred the enemies was extremely rare. Because of her belligerent personality combined with overwhelming combat power, her inauguration as the Acting Director was once cancelled before.

Mirepoc decided the enemies should be decimated as revenge for Luimon. But for Hamyuts, this was the normal state of affairs.

The enemies will be killed. Even though Luimon died, her choice wasn’t any different.

“Call Mattalast. After that, send Bonbo and Matgowe an order to return just in case.”

“Yes ma’am.”

Saying this, Hamyuts went out.

And, she said while turning back,

“Mirepo, what are you doing?”

“Huh?”

“You’re coming too.”

“Y-yes ma’am.”

Mirepoc ran behind Hamyuts in a hurry.

The two who left the room went down a long spiral staircase. Hamyuts, who was walking at the front, opened her mouth.

“So Luimon died, huh?”

“Yes.”

“Well, it can’t be helped. It’s because he was weak.”

Hamyuts said in a hard-to-read tone as usual. Mirepoc recalled her distaste hearing those kinds of words.

Hamyuts calmly continued saying things that desecrated their allies and the dead.

“I told him he couldn’t continue this if he’s that weak. It’s just as I thought, it was obvious he would die.”

“…”

Mirepoc withstood the anger trembling inside her chest.

I know she’s a terribly ruthless person. But does she really need to speak like that?

“But, you know.”

Hamyuts continued.

“He was a good guy.”

Mirepoc couldn’t find any words to reply.

“It was quite a pity to give this job to such a person, right?”

After that, Hamyuts went silent.

Mirepoc who was walking behind could not see Hamyuts’s expression.

Was she holding back tears? Was she suppressing the anger in her body?

Or maybe, she was just keeping up her meek expressionless face?

Mirepoc couldn’t tell.

Exiting Bantorra Library, behind the castle were an airplane hangar and a runway.

The iron door of the hangar opened. Inside it, the propeller airplane was already warming up its engine.

Built in a rare cooperation of the Magic Agency and the Science Agency who were usually on bad terms, it was a propeller plane with a Magic Engine. Originally it had been Hamyuts’ personal possession, but was already used by all Armed Librarians.

After fueling the airplane and leaving a technician to inspect the cockpit, a lone man was standing next to the propeller plane.

It was a tall man wearing black hat low and dressed in a starched black frock coat. A little of his flaxen hair spilled out of his hat.

His name was Mattalast Ballory. His mark as an Armed Librarian was in the form of shiny buttons on his coat’s sleeves.

“Wow. That was fast.”

Hamyuts called out to him.

“So Luimon got offed, huh?”

Mattalast asked.

“Yeah.”

Hamyuts answered.

That was all they talked about Luimon. Just how much meaning did their conversation hold? Did they just want to affirm the facts? Compared to those two who have seen death countless of times, the inexperienced Mirepoc couldn’t understand.

“Can we leave?”

“If the Director wishes to, but…”

“But what, did something happen?”

Said Hamyuts.

“Earlier, the Forecast Committee of the Magic Agency contacted us.”

“By the Forecast Committee you mean those weather report guys?”

Hamyuts asked.

The Forecast Committee was at the Magician’s Head Temple belonging to the Magic Agency, run by the federation of Oracular Magicians.

It was an eclectic of various Oracular Magicians gathered together, but most of their work nowadays was weather forecast.

“Yes. It seems a typhoon is heading towards Toatt mine.”

“…”

Hamyuts’ expression became slightly gloomy. Searching far and wide, there were only few things that could cause her such a reaction. Everybody knew that a typhoon was one of those few.

For Hamyuts, a strong wind was a weakness that she definitely couldn’t overcome.

“Mattalast-san. Is there a place in Toatt mine that the typhoon wouldn’t affect?”

Mirepoc said from behind.

“Mirepo’s on to something. Since Toatt Mine’s ground has a very strong elemental alignment, normally a typhoon shouldn’t pass through.”

“So what about what the weather forecast people said?”

“It’s just heading north for today.”

“So there’s no problem.”

Said Mirepoc.

“That’s right, but… It’s good that I heard about it. Just in case.”

Hamyuts thought for a while.

“If the only weapons they have are human bombs, I should be fine even if there’s a typhoon.”

“Probably. Since it’s you, Director, you’ll probably also be able to win bare-handed.”

Mattalast said with a straight face.

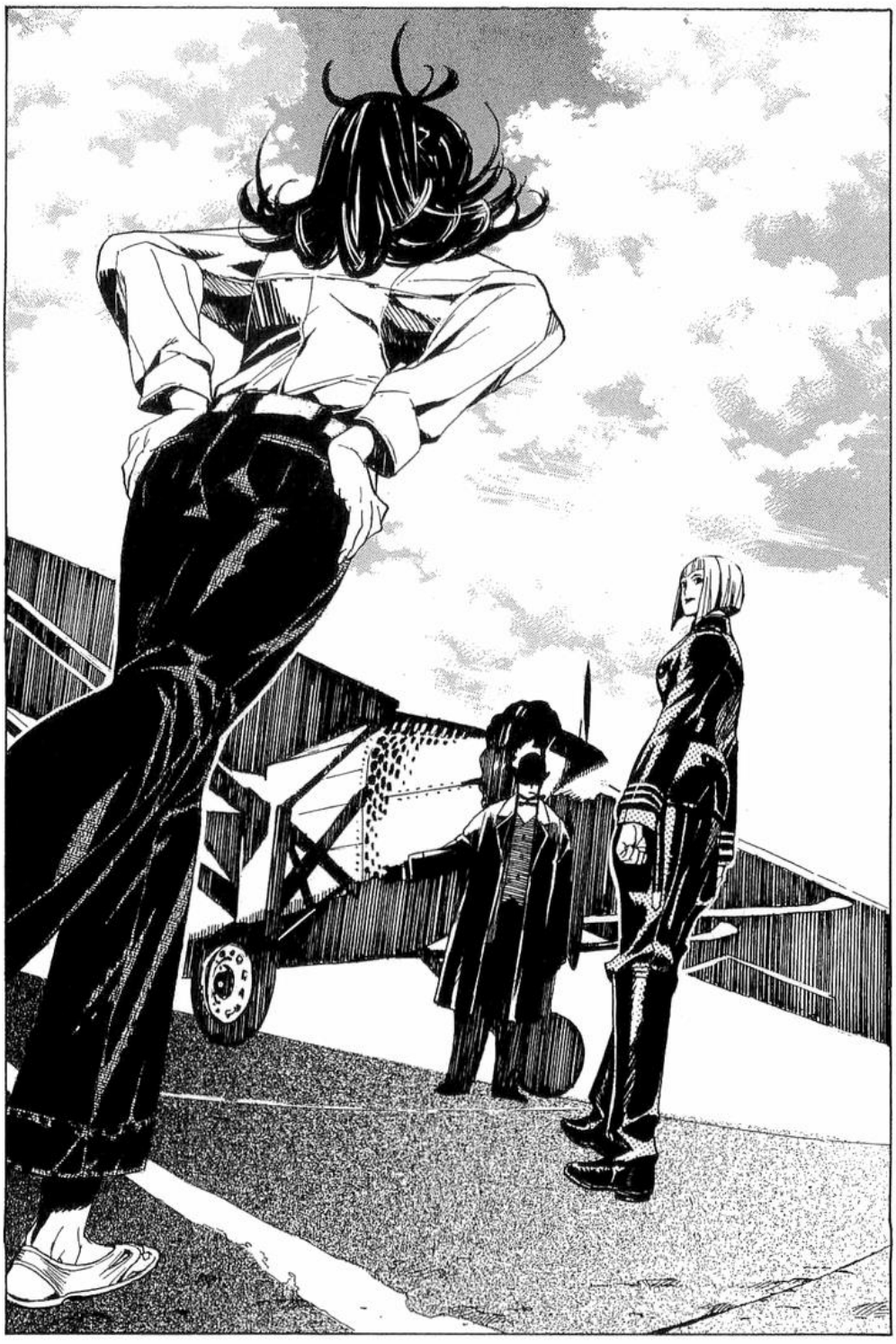
“Well, even if it comes, I’ll just run away until it passes. I’ll manage, so there’s no problem here.”

Saying this, Hamyuts jumped up and lightly landed inside the cockpit.

“Let’s go, everyone.”

Mirepoc and Mattalast got inside the cockpit.

The propeller started rotating noisily.



Colio returned to his room at a late hour.

The room's lamp was not lit. Colio fumbled with the flint and ignited it.

Colio sat on the bed in the dimly lit room.

"…?"

And then he noticed. Relia who should have been sleeping was gone.

Colio wondered if he went out for a walk like he did himself. But he soon noticed – only two bags were left.

He might have thrown away Hyoue's belongings that were no longer needed. But Colio had the bad feeling it was more than that.

He went down the stairs and headed for the inn's owner.

"What is it?"

The innkeeper looked at him annoyingly. She was probably ready to go to sleep.

"Where did Relia go?"

"Relia? Oh, that guy. He went out not a long ago."

"Went out…"

"It's fine. He already paid."

"…Did he check out?"

Colio said while suppressing his agitation.

"Indeed."

"…"

Colio was stunned for a while.

He ran away. Relia ran away.

"Oh right, he also said the other one checked out. And what about you, boy?"

"I…"

Colio said while turning his back to the innkeeper.

"I'll remain here."

Saying only this, Colio returned to his room.

The innkeeper seemed to be wary because two out of the three were suddenly gone. Furthermore, one of them left his luggage behind. She didn't say anything, but he immediately understood she was suspecting them.

I might get kicked out of the inn, Colio thought. He then worried about where he would go to if he did get kicked out. Should he search for another inn, and where? Did he even have enough money? Since he was the only one remaining, he had to think by himself.

But it'll be fine. Colio thought that he would just kill Hamyuts Meseta before getting kicked out, and his thought process stopped there.

I should go to sleep already, he thought.

He wrote inside the diary under the lamp's light.

"Today I haven't killed Hamyuts Meseta."

Usually he would finish writing the entry like this. But, for the first time, Colio was continuing beyond that.

"Hyoue died. Relia ran away. And"

Colio's pen stopped. He wasn't sure if he should write about Calico Princess or not.

After thinking for a while, Colio crossed off the "and".

This was the first time he was troubled over writing in the diary.

Chapter 3: A Bomb, a Human, and the Course of Wind

It was the following day.

Colio went out for a walk just like yesterday. And just then, he walked in the opposite direction of the general flow of people during the morning.

The previous day, there were three people walking like this. But now, only one was left.

Colio realized how much the situation changed in a single day.

Just like yesterday, Colio's feet brought him to that alley. Once again, without any reason.

Maybe Relia would be there? He thought of such things while walking.

"Boy, how was it? Did you read it?"

A voice called to him. Colio stopped and turned around.

It was the Book seller from before. Colio thought he was carried off by that Armed Librarian, but he probably resumed business after that guy died. Colio didn't really care about it, neither today nor yesterday.

"…I don't understand what you're talking about."

The Book seller probably came to request payment for the Book of Calico Princess. Colio thought it was troublesome.

Saying this and trying to escape, Colio's eyes were suddenly drawn to something among the items being sold.

"What is that?"

Colio asked while pointing at a Book. The man answered.

"Hmm? Isn't it obvious? It's a Book fragment. Do you want to buy it, boy?"

Colio knew the milky-white color of that Book. It was the same color as the one belonging to Calico Princess. Almost all other Books were colored somewhere between white, grey and brown, but that Book was as white as milk.

It was the same as before. Thinking this, Colio stretched out his hand.

The moment his finger touched it, the world around him changed again.

"…It's her."

Even Colio could not hear himself muttering this.

"…It's going to hurt a bit. But bear with it like a good boy, okay?"

The first thing he heard was this voice. He immediately recognized it was Calico Princess.

"…Ouch…"

"It's because I need to apply the medicine."

Calico Princess was inside a hut made of rotting wood.

A lone child was lying on hay. He was a pale and poor-looking boy. There were many lice on his wildly-grown hair and fleas inside his straw clothes.

It was dim inside the hut. The lamp next to Calico Princess emitted a faint light. The smell of whale oil drifted in the surrounding air.

Outside the window it was probably night-time. But no one in that hut even thought about admiring the beautiful starry sky.

Other than Calico Princess, there was no one else sitting next to the heavily breathing boy.

"…I want… water. It hurts…"

The moment he said that, the boy started coughing violently. It was a cough that sounded like his throat was burning. Calico Princess took the razor blade resting on the boy's chest.

Calico Princess's white gloves were covered by dirt and blood. Only at the back of her hand some whiteness had remained.

Her dress was in terrible shape. The hem of the pure white skirt was already indistinguishable from a dust cloth, the lace on her chest was blackened by blood, and the wings decorating her back had been cut in half. The tragic state of her dress looked as if she passed through a chimney. Her pretty calico hair was tied in a string and lay on her back.

"Water's no good; your stomach can't take anything right now. Since you're a good boy, please be patient."

"…Okay."

On the boy's slender arm there was a cut about two centimeters deep. She removed the gloves from her hands, revealing pretty long fingers.

"It's going to be itchy for a while, but you mustn't scratch it."

Calico Princess held a small bottle in her hands. She applied the red liquid inside to her fingers and started coating the boy's wounds with it.

"…Here we go, all good. For the following day, not matter how much it hurts, you can't drink any water. Okay? Promise me."

"…"

There was no response. The boy started coughing again.

“I know you’re suffering, but endure it. Please. Just for a little bit longer.”

Calico Princess said while hugging the boy’s body.

“I’m sorry. I’m really sorry.”

“…Thank you, miss…”

The boy said while being held to her chest.

“But, who are you?”

Calico Princess put the boy down without answering anything. He continued staring at her.

When the boy’s coughing had stopped, Calico Princess left the hut. The place seemed to be the countryside. There was a bleak church built down a steep hill.

The lone hut with the boy inside was on the edge of the hill.

It was a dark night. Calico Princess wore a black cloak on her head and ran leaning towards the ground. In order to avoid the center of the village that was lined with many houses, she was entering a forest. She didn’t have any lamp. Despite the darkness, she could still walk around as if it was daytime.

She entered the forest. But just as she passed next to a tree…

“Where are you going?”

A voice called. Calico Princess turned around and saw a single person there.

He was probably in his forties, and terribly obese. He wore a luxurious black mantle with gold embroidery and put a clown’s hat on his head. He was a strange-looking man.

Colio was surprised. He was absolutely sure no-one was there before when she had passed.

“Wyzaf…”

“Oh my, Princess. Your dress is dirty.”

“Since when you were watching?”

Calico Princess said. Her voice was filled with hostility.

It was the first time Colio heard her use such a voice. Before this and in the previous Book, her voice was always filled with mercy and sadness.

“All along, Ever-Laughing Saint.”

“Didn’t I tell you not to call me that?”

The voice of Calico Princess became even more hostile.

“Forgive me for my rudeness.”

Saying this, the man bowed. Retaining this posture, he sank into the ground.

It was then that Colio realized this man was a Magician. Since in the present era Magic was in decline, most humans didn’t get even a single opportunity to see such a casual use of an advanced Magic in front of their eyes.

“…Where is that boy, Ever-Laughing Saint?”

It seemed Calico Princess was called the Ever-Laughing Saint. But Colio wondered where the “Ever-Laughing” part came from. There was only one time he ever saw her smiling. Her face always looked like she was suffering.

“He's just a kid.”

“Hahaha, that again?”

This time, the man appeared on top of a tree.

“Since you're always rushing outside every night to meet your knight lover, he must be a splendid knight. How did you like my bedtime story?"

“Stop saying stupid things.”

“Oh my, there is some straw stuck to your hair.”

“…Didn’t I say to stop that?”

The man disappeared again.

“Please do not displease me. You did not forget you attained your current position only because of me, did you?”

Something resounded from under Calico Princess’s cloak. Colio soon understood it was the sound of her having drawn a sword.

“Ooh, how frightful. In front of your sword, my Magic is as good as a child’s toy.”

Saying this, the man appeared under the tree again.

“…What do you want?”

“It’s troubling when you do such things. We’re trying to make a profit here.”

“…That kid won’t be able to buy our medicine. It doesn’t affect us at all.”

“…That’s not what I said, Shiron.”

Wyzaf’s face changed at once. Up till then he wore the face of a gentleman, but under it a vulgar expression was exposed now.

“If you do such things, I’ll have to correct everything by myself, and you won’t like it, Shiron. This isn’t about one or two brats.

You know what would happen if you keep going that way.”

“…Why you…”

“Apologize. If you won’t apologize, I’ll accordingly kill one person. If you complain I’ll kill another one.”

Calico Princess talked hesitantly.

“I’m sorry. It’s my fault.”

The man suddenly smiled, and bowed respectfully.

“That’s enough, our Princess.”

“…And?”

“I’ll now prepare a lavish feast for you, princess. I’ll also prepare as many superb men as you want. I can prepare delicious men for you, or make it so it will be twenty degrees during the night, or perhaps I’ll get you a little boy who’s as cute as a puppy.”

“I don’t want any of that.”

“Do not say so. We have to celebrate our grand victory.”

“Grand victory? What?”

“Dragon Pneumonia already spread throughout Cadarra Kingdom. The king himself came to apologize to us. We were all awarded knighthoods, and he also prepared three years of our national budget.”

“Will we sell them medicine?”

“No, we have to spread the disease into the Nichinbeta Region and further to the east.”

“Do you understand what’s going to happen if we don’t do it soon?”

“I do. Many people will die.”

“…Please. Sell it already.”

“Don’t make me laugh.”

‘Kukuku’, the man disappeared with an unpleasant laugh.

He left some final words as if melting them inside the wind.

“Anyway, please do not commit suicide. If you die, you understand what the world will come to look like afterwards, right?”

Even after the man disappeared, Calico Princess stood there. Her expression couldn’t be seen.

The Book ended there. Colio let his fingers go of it. Standing in front of his eyes, the Book seller said,

“That’s no good, you can’t look at it before buying it. You have to pay me.”

“I’ll pay.”

Colio took out twenty kirue from his purse. He grabbed the second Book with his sleeve and put it inside his pants pocket.

“I’ve seen a Book like this before. Is there only one Book like that?”

“Can’t you tell by looking? It’s broken. Because it’s broken, you can only read parts of it. There’re probably plenty more of it.”

Oh, so there are plenty more, Colio thought. For some reason, he was incredibly happy.

“Do you have any more?”

“…Boy, if you’re curious, how about this Book?”

“I don’t need it. I want another Book of the same person.”

“…I don’t have any right now. If you come to me again sometime I might have it.”

Colio wasn’t really sure if he could trust him, but he thought that was good enough for now.

Colio returned to the inn in a fast pace, and once again read the Book he just bought.

He watched her voice, expressions and movements numerous times. Even her dirty dress and hands looked beautiful. Even the dim stuffy hut seemed like a magnificent place just by her being in it.

But that hut was already more than a hundred years old, so nothing should be left of it now. While thinking this, Colio felt pain in his chest.

She gave medicine to sick children. Without caring to get her hands dirty. Colio was moved by this. He thought it was wonderful. He once again read the Book and gazed upon the figure of Calico Princess.

Colio read the Book countless times. Since a while ago the sun already travelled across the sky and the day was coming to a close. At some stage he noticed the sinking sun and the fact that he was hungry. But more than that, he wanted to see Calico Princess again. And it wasn't just the two Books he already possessed. He wanted to see many other Books.

Colio remembered that Book-selling man said he might have some more of it at a later time. He immediately grabbed his purse and ran outside.

He ran to the opposite direction of the flow of people returning to their houses. Each time he took a rough breath, the hole in his chest containing the bomb ached. Even though that pain made him cringe, Colio couldn't stop running.

He arrived at the Book seller's spot. But nobody was there right now.

Colio surveyed the surroundings, but couldn't find the "Book" dealer.

He ran around the alley looking for him. He returned to the main road once to search among the crowd of people.

But he just couldn't find him.

He gave up looking for the Book seller. Maybe he could instead find some Book that had fallen on the ground.

But he didn't find any Book fragments either. Colio was exhausted and hungry, and he lowered himself to the ground. He crouched there until it became late. After a while, he gave up and wobbled back towards the inn.

The sunset today was still dim. He walked while sadly thinking of this.

Suddenly, he noticed the figure of a woman from behind around the corner of the road. His head becoming blank, he ran forward.

Calico Princes now turned to the left. He was sure he saw it.

Colio turned around the corner and saw the woman walking ahead with her back to him.

"…Was this an illusion?"

He couldn't understand why this woman seemed like Calico Princess to him. It was just an old woman with completely white hair. The old woman walked away without turning around.

The disappointed Colio regained his composure. Thinking about what he was doing, he smiled wryly.

He perfectly assimilated it.

He forgot everything except Calico Princess.

"What's that supposed to be…"

Colio said. But he actually understood. He learned about this feeling just yesterday.

"…Is this love at first sight?"

His chest hurt. The bomb screeched inside his chest as he ran. When the cut ribs were exposed to the air, he could feel pain.

But, it wasn't the place that hurt. his pain wasn't because of such a reason.

Relia went somewhere, and he would surely never return.

Colio didn't know where to find Hamyuts Meseta.

He had no idea what to do from now on.

However, the intense pain in his chest drove out all of those thoughts.

As the sunset passed, now a grey moon floated low in the sky.

In the corner of a small tavern, Ia Mira suddenly recalled the boy she met last night. He was a gloomy boy named Colio Tonies. They held a strange conversation for a while, and separated without intending to meet ever again.

"…What's wrong?"

"It's nothing. Come on, drink."

Ia Mira was in the middle of work. She was sitting on a cheap leather sofa and poured a drink as she leaned against the body of the man sitting next to her.

Inside the dim interior, many women like Ia were pouring alcohol, bending over or offering flattery for the men that returned from the mines.

She concealed her tear marks with makeup and wore a dress so short that if she were to move a little her underwear could be seen… or rather, she intended them to. It was a terribly cheap dress, but that couldn't be seen in the dark.

Next to Ia, there was a man and one of her colleagues on the other side. They wanted to head for the private room at the back of the tavern. By passing money to women, you could spend a night with them in the private room – this was the tavern's rule.

No man had paid Ia to come to the private room today. *If I won't get that customer now, I won't make any money today*, Ia thought in her heart. But maybe that was for the best.

Just a little more and she would quit the job. Just a little more and she could work at whatever she wanted – thus she thought ever since Cartohelo died.

Then, the customer Ia was hanging out with took something out of his breast pocket.

"Hey, will the two of you drink it?"

"…?"

Then, the customer's hand moved quickly. It seemed he did something to the drink with what he pulled out. Since it was dark, she couldn't see what he's done.

"…Huh? What was that?"

"Isn't it fine? I'll pay you double."

"…"

Occasionally there were men with strange hobbies or drugs in the private room. Ia experienced that countless times. During those times, Cartohelo always comforted her afterwards. Because he was there, she could put up with any painful thing.

"Drink it."

The man put some money into the chest of Ia's dress. She didn't have time for hesitation. Ia poured the sweet wine into her mouth. She could feel something like jelly sliding down her throat.

As Ia drank it, the man suddenly got up and quickly went out of the tavern. The voice of the clerk calling "please do come again" sounded silly.

The sidelined Ia checked her body's condition by moving her neck and listening to her heartbeat.

She didn't feel like anything happened to her. She didn't feel sleepy or strange at all.

But because of this, she was scared.

Dealing with someone with unknown goals was scary. It was even scarier now that she didn't have Cartohelo.

Walking to the back of the store where the owner was wiping off glasses, she spoke in a small voice.

"…Sorry, but I want to leave early tonight."

Around the same time, Relia was walking by himself in the nighttime town.

There was a cloth bag on his back. On his hip was a wallet that became considerably lighter.

Relia slowly crossed the wave of people downtown. The voices of men and women reached his ears from the lined up establishments such as taverns and brothels. However, Relia didn't have any interest in those.

Colio was surely thinking he ran away. But he didn't mind. Because he had nothing to do with Colio anymore.

"…Running away, huh?"

It might be better to just run away like that, Relia thought.

He could search for a job at some town, hide his past and live normally.

Maybe it would have been good if he could do that.

But it was probably impossible.

Neither the people controlling him, Hamyuts Meseta nor the bomb inside his chest will allow him that.

Thinking about this, Relia passed by a woman wearing a cheap dress. She seemed to have an uneasy expression, but Relia didn't notice.

Colio was probably still running around aimlessly. But unlike him, Relia had a goal in mind.

He wasn't afraid of dying. He abandoned his life long ago. In exchange for that, he gained determination. He was determined not to act the way those people wanted him to. Somehow, this determination allowed Relia to stray from the path they intended for him.

Using the bomb in his chest, he was to kill the enemy boss. They wanted to make him go to the Library to do that.

This was the reason Relia separated from Colio, and his reason to live.

This was not meant to avenge Hyoue. It wasn't in order to do the right thing either. Nor did he do it because he wanted to survive.

This was Relia Bookwatt's completely unrelated revenge.

He didn't know anything about the enemy. He only knew the face of the man issuing orders. Even that guy was probably just an underling like Colio and Relia.

He didn't know the leader's face, their location, their purpose or even the organization's name. The only things remaining in his memory were the names "Indulging God Cult" and Crukessa.

Relia pondered about what he should be doing from now on.

Should he believe in his power and act alone?

However, Relia who had no knowledge or skills couldn't fight. He had the bomb in his chest, but since it was made to kill the enemy's boss he would probably be attacked, and it wouldn't do just killing an underling together with him.

He could try to get help from someone. That seemed to be more realistic.

So, who should he ask for help?

The answer was simple. The enemies of his enemies were his allies. There was no option other than Hamyuts Meseta.

"I wonder if it was a mistake coming out."

Relia muttered. Maybe he should have stayed with Colio and tried getting found by Hamyuts.

But there was no point thinking about it. He couldn't retreat now.

"Oops."

A man who walked next to Relia bumped into his shoulder. He could smell a perfume coming from him. Relia thought it was a woman for a moment, but looking at his face it was definitely a man.

The one who bumped into him was a man with a surprisingly handsome face. With his ephemeral appearance and smell drifting in the wind, he almost appeared like a cross-dressing woman.

The man's carefully groomed long hair lay on his back. He wore his three-piece black suit well, and the leather bag hanging from his arm was decorated by silverwork. His body was slender and well suited to what he wore. He had an elegant and graceful figure.

The man looked surprisingly aged. He seemed to be somewhere over thirty, nearing forty. But, he still felt younger than the shabby Relia even despite this.

"Excuse me."

"You should be more careful, young man."

The man said. He didn't look like he fit in this run-down town. No matter how you looked at him, he didn't have the body suitable for manual labor at the mines. He looked like a man with money and status. He might have been an Armed Librarian. Relia thought this while staring at the man's face.

"You don't look like a person from around here. Where did you come from?"

The long-haired man said suddenly. Relia was surprised he immediately struck a conversation with him.

"Umm, I'm just touring, and looking for someone."

"In such a place? Interesting."

For some reason, the man seemed interested in Relia. Relia found it bit unnatural, but he didn't think about it too deeply.

"Are you perhaps related to the recent bombing incidents?"

Relia was surprised.

“Hahaha, you look so alarmed.”

The man grinned.

“Can you perhaps come and talk with me for a bit? I didn’t confirm it, but you’re probably Relia.”

“How do you know my name?”

“Because it is important.”

The man said this and raised his index finger. It was then that Relia realized the man came to speak with him since the very beginning.

“Who are you?”

“You may call me Cigal. My occupation… well, it varies. Right now I’m working at a pharmaceutical company.”

The two walked together, heading towards a nearby tavern.

The tavern Cigal led Relia was very quiet, or in other words, not very popular. It sold only cheap liquor and very little cuisine, and it also had no women. That place didn’t look fitting for Cigal, but Relia didn’t have any problem with it.

Cigal brought the glass of beer he ordered to his mouth and talked to Relia.

“You were supposed to come here with some allies. Where are they?”

Relia felt amazed at how much this man knew. As he thought, that man was probably related to Hamyuts Meseta's assassination. He wondered if Hamyuts also had that kind of intelligence network.

“Three of us came to this town. One died yesterday, and one is at the inn… should be, at least.”

Relia answered honestly.

“Should be?”

“We’ve separated.”

“What?”

Cigal’s face looked slightly upset.

“That’s unexpected…”

Cigal, placing his hand on his chin, was thinking.

“What’s unexpected?”

“Don’t worry about it. Rather than that, I believe you want to talk with me about something?”

Relia was surprised at this person seeing through him.

“You may not know much about it, Cigal-san, but let me tell you my story. I - no, we - were being kept by some organization for a long time.”

He had plenty to talk about. But, after about five minutes, Cigal stopped his story short.

“I roughly know about your circumstances.”

As Relia thought, this person knew almost everything that he also knew.

“There’s no mistake. It’s the Indulging God Cult.”

“So it was those Indulging God Cult guys as I thought.”

“Do you know them?”

“Only that name.”

Cigal stroked his chin with a clean finger, contemplating.

“I wonder if we should really be talking about it…”

After thinking for a while, Cigal spoke.

“Anything about the Indulging God Cult is heavily classified information - meaning it’s a crime even just knowing about it. You’re going to get your memory erased on top of getting sent to jail. And you want to hear about them in more detail as well… is that really fine?”

“I don’t mind. I already gave up on this life.”

After saying this, a question suddenly came to Relia’s mind.

Thinking about it, who exactly was this man?

It was around the same time that Relia and Cigal came to the tavern.

Hamyuts Meseta's group flew for a distance of about 5000 kilometers towards Toatt Mining Town.

The propeller plane continued flying and emitted smoke from the Magic Engine in its rear. In the back seat, Hamyuts was turning the knob of a radio.

Mirepoc was next to her. The one piloting was Mattalast.

“Director, do you want to hear music?”

Mirepoc said.

“No, I’m checking the weather report.”

Hamyuts was talking about the typhoon.

“Did you know? A typhoon comes close to the Toatt region once every ten years. But it seems there had been no direct hit during the last century.”

“I know. It’s such a bad timing. Even if it’s me, I’m helpless against a typhoon.”

They started hearing the cold voice of the announcer mixed with background noises.

“…While gathering power on the high seas, the great typhoon ‘Captain Choke’ is heading eastward. The Science Agency declared the emergency scale as growing above “Queen Watorre”-level into the maximum “King Bawely”-level. We’re doing our best to keep our observation. Moreover, the thirty-three people congress of the Oracular Magicians unanimously predicts it will keep on moving eastwards. The Science Agency’s research stations also seem to support this notion.”

“What do you think, Matt? You’re an Oracular Magician too, after all.”

"You can't rely on me for that."

Mattalast complained. His Predictive Magic had some specifics to it.

His specialty was using handguns, so his Predictive abilities were low-grade. He could see up to two seconds of the future at the most. More than that and he would only be able to give a simplified weather forecast.

“Well, I don’t think it’ll come though. But the future is unstable.”

“You sure aren’t very clear.”

“Please don’t say that. Someone like me is normal. It’s that woman who’s the exception among exceptions.”

“Moreover, it should be noted that the course is expected to slowly change away from the Toatt region due to its powerful ground’s force field and head to the north, where the force field is weaker.”

The radio said the same things as Mattalast did before.

“Well, it seems to be fine.”

Saying this, Hamyuts switched off the radio.

“Seems to be.”

Hamyuts looked up at the cloudy sky.

“Come to think of it, that woman never once in her life had to worry about ‘Should I bring an umbrella today?’ and things like that.”

“Probably. I’m also like that, though.”

“I wonder how prescient people feel. What about you, Mattalast?”

Mattalast shook his head.

“I don’t know. That woman is orders of magnitudes above me. I have no idea about thousand years from now.”

“That’s true…”

Hamyuts sighed.

“The Ever-Laughing Witch, huh… I wonder if she predicted what we’re doing as well.”

“She might have.”

“I wonder what that woman thought about."

“Who knows.”

They seemed to lose interest in their chatter.

“A whole year had already passed.”

Mattalast said, his tone becoming serious.

“That's true."

“…Seems like it’s going to be a long fight.”

“Right.”

While saying this, Hamyuts began thinking about long past events as well as their current battle.

A year ago, in the fall of 1923, Hamyuts Meseta led a squad of Armed Librarians to assault a ship anchored at Allow bay, east of the Ismo Republic.

It was the base of a terror organization found and investigated by the Ismo Republic. The President of the Ismo Republic entrusted the mission to the highly combat-able Armed Librarians.

Their strategy which was thought to easily wrap up the whole business was met with unexpected problems.

A powerful barrier being erect from the ship to its outside completely camouflaged it.

While trying to penetrate this barrier, the Magicians of the Armed Librarian squad were attacked by people. About a dozen men wearing life jackets pretended to surrender themselves to the ship Hamyuts was riding in, and then exploded. The second wave of human bombs came to attack the Armed Librarians who were thrown into the ocean.

Six hours later, there were no enemies left. There were one casualty and six wounded on the Armed Librarians' side. For them, this was a rare result.

The Armed Librarians that somehow took control of the situation rushed onboard.

And what they found there seemed unbelievable.

More than one hundred people were kept inside the ship. They weren't just *on* the ship. They were being *kept inside*. They were pushed inside a narrow stone room, living among the smell of dirt and feces. There was nothing in the room, not even a bed, except a bucket with bait inside it and moldy bread crumbs thrown around.

The people kept inside couldn't understand their situation and had low intelligence. Most of them had their spirit destroyed to the extent they couldn't even use human speech.

They were called Meats. They received the same treatment as cattle or chickens. They were human livestock; pigs wearing a man's skin.

Even for the Armed Librarians, who witnessed countless scenes of carnage, their appearance was nauseating.

The terrorists were treating them as useful tools. Some of them were used for medical experiments, some of them were made living bombs, and some were used as bait for wild animals.

From the memoirs left behind by the terrorists, Hamyuts knew that the Indulging God Cult was involved. They weren't an organization acting alone, but a subordinate organization of the Indulging God Cult.

The Indulging God Cult was an illegal cult that all nations as well as the Armed Librarians have tried to crack down using all of their efforts. Even just knowing about it – let alone joining it – was against the law. The Books of people involved with the Indulging God Cult were sealed under more than four levels, and all of the "Indulging God Cult" entries in the world's encyclopedias were being censored by the top ranks.

All public organizations, starting with the Armed Librarians, have tried to crack them down for a long time.

The Indulging God Cult had just one doctrine.

"Man and God are one and the same, thus thy soul is the soul of God.

Thy happiness is the happiness of God, and thy grief is the grief of God.

Thy only purpose is to fulfill thyself. All is for God's sake."

On the basis of this one doctrine, all of their desires for money, glory, food, sex, domination, destruction and many more have been justified.

Also, they denied the existence of any law or order interfering with the achievement of their desires, mocking concepts like justice and equality and declaring concepts like kindness, romantic love, familial love and camaraderie as worthless.

For them, every action to fulfill their desires was legitimate, everything hindering it needed to be eliminated, and sacrifices towards their goals were acceptable.

Thus all members of the Indulging God Cult were able to calmly conduct all sorts of inhuman atrocities.

For them, there was no concept of humanity. It was because all of their behavior was legitimate. They also had no concept of helping each other. Even fellow cult members might become enemies if they stood in each other's ways.

Just describing their countless crimes would fill up an entire book. People like the general known as "Devil Warlord" Malgeaz who massacred a million people during his three years in office, "Meat Grove" Barea II who became the ruler of the Magic Capital Baerase and devoted his life to debauchery, or the "Ever-Laughing Witch" Shiron Booyacornish were renowned. Of course, the public didn't know they have belonged to the Indulging God Cult.

Hamyuts immediately ordered the annihilation of the Cult and dispatched her men to various places.

They had only one clue.

Only the name of the leader had been left in the terrorists' memoirs – Cigal Crukessa.

Cigal spoke indifferently as if describing a story he had seen at the cinema just yesterday.

He talked about the doctrine of the Indulging God Cult and their activities.

"…Such a cult…"

Relia, who heard these explanations from Cigal, was trembling.

"So that's why even knowing about it is a felony."

"Exactly, Relia-kun. Hahaha. You are also a criminal."

Are you kidding me? Relia cursed in his heart, but didn't let it out of his mouth.

"…I don't mind. I've thrown my life away."

"Hah, you did?"

He could see Cigal averting his face while saying this. Relia couldn't understand why he did so.

"Thrown your life away."

"Yes."

Relia couldn't understand Cigal's aversion.

Cigal took a cigarette from his breast pocket and lit it.

"I see. So, Relia-kun. Do you know why the Indulging God Cult still exists? It went through a thorough crackdown. They went to amazing efforts."

"…I don't know."

Cigal shrugged.

“That’s because they are right. People of the Indulging God Cult are the only ones to serve God in the true sense of the word. For example, Past God Bantorra and Present God Bantorra are only the Overseers for the true God. Hamyuts Meseta who serves it is but a trifling human. She doesn’t know anything about God’s happiness.

During the Paradise Era all humans were happy, and accordingly God was also happy. God’s happiness is none other than man’s happiness.

But after a long time, man’s worth fell to disastrous levels. People as trifling as Hamyuts Meseta began controlling the world, ignoring people’s true happiness.

We must rise up against this reality.

We have to embody the true happiness for the sake of God. Isn’t it so, Relia?”

“…”

Relia couldn’t really tell if he was being honest. But it seemed Cigal didn’t care whether Relia understood him or not.

He only knew that this man wasn’t Hamyuts’s subordinate.

“So you don’t understand. Relia. To achieve true happiness, people like Hamyuts are no good at all. Well then, return to your friends already and kill Hamyuts Meseta.”

“Hamyuts?”

Relia’s confused mind accelerated when he heard those words. His emotions and thoughts arrived at a single conclusion.

“Cigal-san… Cigal. Are you the boss of the Indulging God Cult?”

“Huh? You can’t understand even that?

Oh no. Man’s value really has fallen. Why do I have to listen to this idiot?”

Relia placed his hand inside his chest, feeling the texture of the vacuum tube with his fingers.

“What are you trying to do, Relia?”

Cigal said while blowing a cloud of smoke.

“Why did you talk with me?”

“Out of boredom. Because Hamyuts is taking forever to come here.”

“That’s all?”

“I’m regretting it now. I’m already fed up with your idiocy.”

“…”

“Return to your fellow bombs already.”

Relia felt blood rushing to his head. He talked to Cigal with a voice trembling with excitement.

“Let me ask you one thing. Depending on your answer, I might spare you.”

“What are you talking about?”

“You talked about true happiness, right, Cigal?”

Relia stroked the vacuum tube on top of his clothes.

“Yes, I did.”

“What do you think of the humans who became unhappy for the sake of your true happiness?”

“What are you saying? Is there even such a thing?”

Cigal’s expression of truly not understanding him rubbed Relia’s feelings the wrong way.

“I’m asking you what you feel about people like Hyoue, Colio, and me. Answer, Cigal Crukessa.”

“Oh, I don’t know what you mean by that.”

Cigal pointed with the cigarette towards Relia’s face.

“Aren’t you just bombs?”

Suddenly, Relia was grinning.

No-one will ever know the reason for this smile, and probably not even Relia himself knew.

Perhaps even he didn't notice that he was smiling.

In any case Relia was smiling, and while smiling, he moved his fingers.

His fingers crushed the vacuum tube inside his chest, and his final smile was blasted to smithereens.

Cigal moved.

“Again?”

“Bring some water, quickly!”

Casting a skeptical gaze at the worried face of the people who witnessed the third bombing incident, Cigal Crukessa left the tavern. He returned his drawn sword to his waist.

Cigal leaned on a nearby wall, took out another cigarette and lit it.

And along with the exhaled smoke, he talked to himself.

“That was seriously stupid. If he died anyway he should have attacked Hamyuts instead so that his life would have some small worth.

And if he was going to die to entertain me, it shouldn’t have been such an inelegant manner of death. I wonder what he thought about life. Well, he probably wasn’t thinking at all. There are plenty of people like him.

Also, I can hardly understand them diminishing their own values. But even if I were to understand people like that, nothing good will come of it. Hahaha.”

Cigal’s cigarette had the smell of gunpowder.

He frowned and threw the cigarette away. He even started discarding everything in his pockets. There was some ash even on his black suit.

“It sure became unpleasant. The entire world is like this. Everything is so wrong.

I wonder if there’s really no angel that can save and love me?”

Cigal gazed at the sky. The clouds floating above have accelerated a little bit. A storm was approaching.

“Making money is silly. Even such a thing bothering me is a sign of the wrong things in this world. Trifling people such as Hamyuts Meseta making a fuss really troubles me. So stupid.”

Cigal kept talking to himself.

Ia Mira, dressed in pajamas and lying on her side on one of two side-by-side beds, awoke because of a distant explosion.

Looking at the column of smoke rising from the distance, she recalled the bombing incident that killed Cartohelo.

“Isn’t this the third one?”

While saying this, Ia shook due to the cold.

There were people running in a hurry among the wind that was growing stronger. They were carrying buckets full of water or wheelbarrows loaded with sand to somewhere.

It was night and the wind was growing strong.

The radio said the typhoon would come close while maintaining its force.

“…Cartohelo.”

Ia murmured this name.

Now, the name of her lover that once helped her anxiety disappear only served to increase it further.

She was terribly cold.

Since a while ago, she felt some irritation inside her chest.

What was she made to drink?

“Cartohelo…”

Ia muttered again. The anxiety she bore just got heavier.

Chapter 4: A Bomb, a Librarian, and the Ever-Laughing Witch

It was morning.

Colio spent the entire previous day in his room.

He didn't know about the third bombing incident or about the fact that Hamyuts was heading towards the town.

He was sitting on his bed and staring at the wall.

Colio was only thinking about one thing – Calico Princess.

He didn't even know her name. He couldn't call her by her name.

Thinking about this made his heart ache. Her name. Even such a small thing seemed so important for Colio that he was prepared to risk his life for it.

"…Ever-Laughing Witch."

Thus she was called. Both in the first and second Books, she was referred to as a witch.

But he didn't want to call her this way. She barely had a normal smile, let alone an "Ever-Laughing" one, so why was she called that?

In the first place, why was she a witch? She gave medicine for children; didn't that mean she was a splendid woman?

Colio continued praising her in his heart.

But no matter how much he would praise her, she wouldn't rejoice.

Because she was already dead.

"…It hurts."

He murmured.

Thinking this far, Colio realized – what am I?

Aren't I a bomb?

Can a bomb even love? Can a bomb seek happiness?

Since a bomb can't look for love or happiness, what are these feelings?

Colio kept thinking.

His thoughts kept going around and around and seemed to lead nowhere.

After more than a day, Hamyuts' propeller plane reached the skies of Toatt Mining Town. The air started becoming turbid, so the plane's windows were getting foggy.

“We really need to do something about the dirty air here.”

Hamyuts looked outside through the window.

Toatt Mining Town was built at Hamyuts’s expense as a place to mine out new Books from.

In order to dig through the hard ground, they set up a coal power reactor and advanced mechanized drilling facilities. As a result they were able to dig out valuable ancient Books, but in exchange the smoke from the coal reactor covered up the town.

“Wouldn’t some wind clean it up?”

Mattalast said. Because there wasn’t much wind blowing around the area of the Toatt mines, the air was stagnant.

Maybe if there was some wind, the air would become slightly cleaner.

“But we can’t use that as a solution.”

“That’s true.”

“I want to do something about it, but I don’t have much money.”

While speaking about this, Hamyuts opened the cockpit’s window. Wind started rushing in, vigorously blowing Hamyuts’ hair.

“We’ve talked about this before, but Mirepo is just our contact. She needs to hide in the Toatt Mountains because we can’t send her out.”

“Yes ma’am.”

“Mattalast, team up with the town’s sheriff. Consult the railway company officials. List up all people who came to Toatt Mining Town within the last three months and match them with the headquarters’ records.”

“Understood.”

“All other people are to be contacted through Mirepo. There’s no need for her to purposely come all the way to Toatt Mining Town.”

The two nodded. Hamyuts’s instructions were always concise.

“Well then, good luck.”

“Director, be careful.”

“You too.”

After these small exchanges, Hamyuts jumped out of the window. Falling headlong, she lightly rotated her body and landed with a huge trace on the ground.

The airplane was going away. Mattalast threw the luggage from the cockpit, and Hamyuts caught it.

“Well then…”

Hamyuts got off in the middle of the mountains area. She could overlook the mines and the town from uphill. The grass and ground around the area Hamyuts landed were torn away due to the impact. Hamyuts could feel the moles running away with her Sensory Threads.

The town was two kilometers away. The view was good and there weren't many obstacles, so the conditions were good.

"It's time to begin. I should hurry."

Saying this, Hamyuts released Sensory Threads from her body. Two millions of them came out and rode the faint updraft.

The invisible Sensory Threads spread far and went into the town.

The feel of the stagnant air in the Toatt mines was transmitted through them.

Information was sent to Hamyuts's brain from those Sensory Threads. The feel of Toatt Mining Town's soil, of houses, of people's skins. The vibration, quality and contents of sounds. The feel of the town's landscape and people.

She tried sorting the information sent from the two million Sensory Threads to find what she wanted.

"…Kill Hamyuts Meseta."

She felt the voice of a man who muttered this.

She felt a paper with "Kill Hamyuts Meseta" written on it.

A woman concealing a knife.

A man with a bomb inside his body.

A woman with a bomb inside her body.

People that kept on whispering "Kill Hamyuts Meseta".

Hamyuts was receiving their numbers and whereabouts.

There was a bunkhouse near the mines. The manager called towards three people who were carrying piled up soil.

"Hey. You newcomers aren't coming for a meal?"

"…"

The three miners who were in the midst of working slowly raised their faces.

"A meal, a meal. If you won't eat you can't work."

"…Let's eat."

"Right."

Those three seemed quite creepy to the other men. They always stayed together and never took off their clothes. They never spoke about their origins or anything else. They didn't know if they were brothers or friends.

The three kept talking in whispers.

"Let's kill Hamyuts Meseta."

"Right, we'll kill Hamyuts Meseta."

It was near the entrance of the downtown.

Beggars raised their voices towards people crossing the road. Some of them tried appealing by talking about their plights, some were showing off their young children, and some were singing heartbreaking songs.

Among those, there was one beggar who didn't do anything.

Facing downwards, he was just murmuring to himself.

"Kill Hamyuts Meseta. Kill Hamyuts Meseta."

There was a new house abandoned decades ago that nobody bought.

Inside this supposedly empty house there were numerous women. They were sitting on the ground, their hair unkempt and their clothes dirty. The women clearly had their spirits broken.

"Kill Hamyuts."

"Kill Hamyuts Meseta."

The women murmured this while drooling.

There were people who finished moving to a house and holed themselves inside without even greeting their neighbors.

This four-people family sat around their only furniture which was a table.

"Kill Hamyuts Meseta."

"Kill Hamyuts Meseta."

They continually muttered.

The Sensory Threads were Hamyuts's specialty in Magic, and the best sort of ability to support her. This ability allowed her to discharge tactile, auditory and visual sensors from her body.

She created invisible and intangible threads using her Magic power and sent them flying. And through these threads she could perceive the shape, color and sounds of everything they touched.

That by itself wasn't a difficult or special ability. But as for the amount and length of the threads, none could compete with Hamyuts.

The threads could reach up to fifty kilometers. Their numbers could surpass ten billion. It wasn't very difficult for Hamyuts to completely wrap up this town with her Sensory Threads.

"…Okay. Is this all?"

In less than an hour, Hamyuts completely grasped the locations of all enemies within a radius of five kilometers.

"So I guess I'll get to it."

Saying this, Hamyuts took a weapon out of her back pocket.

At a first glance, that weapon seemed to be mere string.

Its length was a bit more than Hamyuts' height. And on its middle, a small pocket made of cloth was attached.

That weapon was commonly known as a sling.

It was a weapon older than guns, Magic or bows. It was a weapon used by men shortly after they were created by the Overseer of the Beginning and the End, when they weren't much different than monkeys. By swinging up stones with a string, they could use centrifugal force to hurl them.

Of course, this wasn't a mere sling.

The string was made by twisting together a woman's hair in a unique way, producing a divine wire with the methods introduced by the Future God Orntorra during ancient times. The cloth pocket was made in a similar manner from the skin of an ancient dragon discovered inside an iceberg.

It was a sling said to be difficult to destroy just like the Gods' Memorial Weapons.

It had four types of "bullets". There were polyhedral balls for general purposes, disk shaped balls for long range and round balls for close range rapid fire. She could also use plain stones picked up from the ground.

The maximum speed of the bullets fired from her slingshot could reach above five times the speed of sound. Her maximum range was thirty five kilometers. She had a 100% hit rate on stationary targets at the range of twenty five kilometers.

Other than God, no one was better at sniping from a distance than Hamyuts.

"Hamyu…"

The man who was grumbling to himself fell without warning towards the beggar sitting close to him.

The beggar, after being dumbed for a little while, raised a terrified scream.

Half of the back of the man’s head had been blown away. His brain fluids poured out like some rich sauce.

Hamyuts was swinging the string above her head. The polyhedral sniping bullet in the leather exceeded the speed of sound in the interval of five seconds. And she shot it after exactly six seconds.

Without checking if the ball hit, she loaded another one. In another six seconds she accelerated and shot it.

A wall was broken through. A heart had been penetrated from the back. Iron gravel struck the ground.

With a gaping hole opened in the center of her chest, the body of a woman fell forward.

"…Ah?"

"…Ahhh…"

Seeing the collapsed woman, the other women around raised a cry that sounded like a dog grunting.

"Uhh…"

"Uahh…"

The women who had their spirits broken continued muttering.

The next shot punched through the head of another woman. She fell to the ground as if her strings were cut off.

And after six more seconds, the third shot penetrated through the last two remaining women.

Hamyuts did not stop.

Acceleration. Shot. Reload. This process was repeated sixteen times without rest.

The Sensory Threads transmitted the feel of the faraway bombs that were shot by Hamyuts.

All of the balls hit without a hitch. And all targets were instantly killed.

For Hamyuts, shooting a defenseless target within the range of five kilometers was as simple as grabbing an apple from a table.

"…Well, that was easy."

Hamyuts said frankly. And she released her Sensory Threads again.

The battle had just started.

"…Calico Princess…"

Colio murmured this name who knows how many times. He rolled over on his bed, touching the Book so he could see Calico Princess again.

He didn't know that in addition to him, twenty one other bombs were sent to Toatt Mining Town in order to kill Hamyuts. He only knew about Relia and Hyoue, and didn't know Relia had already died.

He didn't know that the sixteen remaining bombs were sniped and easily defeated by Hamyuts.

Colio was also unaware of the fact that just now, the invisible and intangible Sensory Threads carefully checked the bomb inside his chest and the Book on top of his bed.

He was just lying on his bed in silence.

While he didn't know anything, the situation was rapidly changing.

"Come out, Cigal Crukessa-kun."

Hamyuts stretched her Sensory Threads again.

She was exploring the entire town while searching for unusual people.

She was looking for someone who would make a move now that she crushed all bombs.

Someone who would try to contact the bombs while acting unnaturally;

Someone who would receive an urgent message;

Someone who would come near her;

She was carefully searching for those.

Time had passed. The sun that was high in the sky started sinking towards the horizon.

The Sensory Threads enveloping the town gradually become sluggish.

Hamyuts felt a headache.

She returned the fully spread Sensory Threads to her body.

Her Sensory Threads weren't almighty. If released for long periods of time, her head wouldn't be able to grasp all of the information. It would become muddled. Hamyuts took a long breath and waited for her brain to recover.

In her first search, she wasn't able to feel the presence of Cigal Crukessa.

She was only able to sense his expendable pawns, the bombs.

Even for Hamyuts, consistently monitoring more than 5000 people to look for her enemy was impossible.

“Well then, he’s quite something…”

Hamyuts muttered so, recognizing her enemy was troublesome.

Taking her luggage, Hamyuts carefully went down the mountains while still maintaining her Sensory Threads.

For Hamyuts, who was a sniper, heading into town was dangerous.

But still, there was a place she had to go to.

I don’t know if it’s a trap or not, but I have to try and make contact – Hamyuts thought.

She went into town, mixing herself with passersby.

Hamyuts was headed towards a cheap inn at the end of the main road.

In this town, there was probably one bomb left.

Hamyuts didn’t kill him. It wasn’t become she wanted to question him and get information. It was because that bomb was holding a Book.

Her Sensory Threads couldn’t read Books, but they could feel the person’s soul inside. Hamyuts knew the feel of that Book.

There was no mistake. There was no other owner of that unprecedented magic power other than that woman.

Hamyuts set her foot inside the lobby of the cheap inn.

“Hello there. Hamyuts Meseta has some small errands here.”

Hearing that unbelievable name, the innkeeper opened her mouth wide in amazement.

“By H-Hamyuts, you mean…”

“Yes. I’m Hamyuts Meseta.”

Hamyuts flashed a grin towards the innkeeper whose mouth was flapping open and close.

“I need to kill one of your lodgers.”

The innkeeper’s mouth was open to the extent it looked like it would fall apart.

“You don’t mind, right?”

The innkeeper shook her head vertically numerous times.

Hamyuts’s name was so widely known that it caused that kind of horrified reaction. Even notoriety was something useful.

Following the innkeeper, Hamyuts went to the second floor.

“It’s here.”

She was pointing at a room.

“Can you call him out?”

The innkeeper knocked on the door.

“Colio Tonies-san. Are you there?”

Hearing the innkeeper's call, Hamyuts thought to herself ‘Eh, so that’s his name’.

“I don’t need to eat.”

The dry response came with the gloomy voice of a boy.

“You have a visitor.”

Hamyuts had already spread the barrier of Sensory Threads around. She grasped the situation around the inn almost perfectly. There was nothing strange about the innkeeper. Within a radius of one hundred meters, there were no armed people except Colio Tonies who had a single kitchen knife. She only had to be vigilant about Colio’s bomb. That much wasn’t enough to make Hamyuts afraid.

Nevertheless, Hamyuts didn’t discount the possibility of a trap yet. She kept calm on the surface, but maximized her vigilance and tension.

She could feel Colio Tonies clattering as he ran up to door with her Sensory Threads.

“Relia? Did you come back? Or is it Ia? Ia Mira?”

Hamyuts suddenly opened the door. It bumped into Colio’s nose and he fell.

“Oops, sorry.”

Saying this, she entered the room.

The innkeeper ran away.

“…Who are you?”

Colio said while holding his nose. He didn’t seem to be lying.

He seemed surprised by the unknown visitor.

“Really? You don’t know my face?”

He had a puzzled expression.

“Aren’t you a bomb?”

Hearing these words, Colio’s face was contorted with shock. Hamyuts grinned.

“If you don’t know I’ll tell you. I’m Hamyuts Meseta. Nice to meet you.”

“…Aa, aah…”

It seemed like Colio couldn't move.

"Were you expecting a scarier person?"

Hamyuts said while grinning.

Colio who fell to the floor couldn't move. His legs froze. His mind became blank.

"Kill Hamyuts Meseta."

"Kill Hamyuts Meseta."

Those words were bubbling inside his consciousness.

In front of his eyes was Hamyuts Meseta. Colio existed to kill her.

However, his fingers that should have crushed the vacuum tube were just trembling next to his body.

"Were you expecting a scarier person?"

Hamyuts said.

Colio thought about moving his fingers.

Why won't they move? Why are his fingers trembling and his legs paralyzed?

Was it because Hamyuts was scary? Or was it because he never practiced reaching his bomb?

Move.

Move your fingers and activate the bomb. You're a bomb.

Kill Hamyuts Meseta. Kill Hamyuts Meseta.

Colio could feel his mind being full to the brim with those words.

"Well then… I have a question. Where's Cigal Crukessa?"

"I don't know…"

Why are you answering? Colio scolded himself. More importantly, activate the bomb and kill Hamyuts.

But, if he'll die he won't be able to…

Be able to…

"Or it can't be that you're actually Cigal Crukessa?"

Hamyuts asked.

"No. I don't know him."

Colio asked himself- *why?* He shouldn't hesitate like this…

Shouldn’t hesitate…

“So, Colio-kun. Where’s Cigal?”

“I don’t know.”

“Do you know how Cigal looks?”

“No.”

“You haven’t met him?”

“…No.”

“Well then.”

Hamyuts seemed to be surprised. She scratched the tip of her nose, and then said the following words.

“By the way, Colio-kun. Aren’t you supposed to kill me?”

“…”

“Haha. I see. So that’s how you are.”

Her wide smile seemed terrifying to Colio instead of calming.

His heart kept shouting loudly to kill Hamyuts. However, his body just wouldn’t listen. It ignored the battle instructions and just trembled uselessly.

Probably wondering about Colio’s fear, Hamyuts got near his face while being defenseless.

At a distance he could feel her breath on his face, Hamyuts said,

“Well, let’s calmly get to business. Colio-kun. Show me Shiron’s Book.”

“Book?”

“You know. You have it, right?”

Hamyuts smiled.

“Show me Shiron Booyacornish’s Book.”

“…Shiron?”

Colio asked. It was an unfamiliar name. But he had a feeling he knew who it belonged to.

“Here it is.”

Hamyuts went a step forward. And within a touching distance, she said,

“I’m confiscating it.”

It was strange.

Those words recovered his composure.

Strong feelings of not wanting to lose that Book rose within Colio.

His scared body retained its functions. His hand reflexively went to his chest. He forcefully made his fist touch the vacuum tube on top of his clothes.

"…Oh?"

Hamyuts saw Colio's change. The dreadfulness hidden behind her smile increased.

"I won't give it."

"Oh my."

"If you'll try to take it, I'll explode together with you."

"Together? Double suicide?"

"I don't mind whatever it is. I won't give you that Book."

Hamyuts stared at Colio.

"You sure are rebellious. If you do that, you'll make your big sister here very sad. Just don't call me an aunty instead because of my age."

Hamyuts was fooling around. Colio returned a determined glare.

"No. I won't give it up."

"So show it to me. Just showing it should be fine."

"…I won't give it up."

Colio shook his head. Hamyuts's smile started looking angry little by little.

"What are you thinking?"

"…I'm…"

While thinking of an answer, Colio started slightly questioning himself. Hamyuts decided that was enough for her. No, maybe she didn't need any opening in the first place.

In a second, she secured both of his hands. His body was turned around and she twisted his arms and elbows above his back. Until the moment he raised his voice due to the pain, Colio couldn't understand what was happening.

"…I'll break them."

Hamyuts said.

"…I won't give it up."

Colio answered. Hamyuts spoke in a slightly troubled tone.

"What are you thinking? Do you want the Dragon Pneumonia to spread?"

He clenched his teeth due to the pain in his wrists. He was already accustomed to pain. More importantly, some determination from an unknown origin was moving his body.

“I don’t know. I don’t know about that thing. I won’t give you this girl’s Book!”

“…Hmph.”

At that moment, just when he thought his hands became free, his neck was turned around. It seemed a large rope was wrapped around it.

When he thought he felt it tightening, Colio’s consciousness sank into darkness.

“Boy. Wake up.”

He heard Hamyuts’s voice. Colio had been laid on the bed. Hamyuts was on the next bed – probably the one used by Hyoue – and peeked at his face.

“Hey. I don’t understand the situation at all. Did Cigal give you that Book?”

Hamyuts said. She held Calico Princess’s Book in her gloved left hand. She probably already checked its contents.

“…Give it back!”

“Can’t do. I need to store it at my Library.”

“I don’t care about that. Give it back.”

Hamyuts shrugged as if saying ‘Oh dear’.

“Well then, if you’ll answer my question, I’ll consider it a bit. Also, you can’t use your bomb. Before you’ll even move your fingers I’ll break your head.”

It didn’t seem to be an exaggeration.

From the feeling of her grabbing his wrist, he couldn’t think of her as human. Colio could also not perceive her speed. Before he could break the vacuum tube, Hamyuts would probably crush his skull.

Hamyuts Meseta was the world’s strongest person. Colio could feel her might with his whole body.

“…I bought the Book from an illegal Book seller. He put up his store in some back alley.”

“Wow!”

Hamyuts raised a wild voice.

“Well then, wow. I can’t believe it. Is that actually true?”

Colio nodded.

“So, do you know about Cigal Crukessa? Or about Dragon Pneumonia?”

"…I only know a bit about Crukessa."

"What is it?"

"I once heard that name. I don't know much else."

"And do you know about Dragon Pneumonia?"

Colio shook his head.

"Nothing?"

Colio nodded. Hamyuts seemed troubled.

"That's quite the coincidence. But is that really it? You have Shiron Booyacornish's Book after all."

"Shiron…"

He wasn't sure, but that was probably her name. That name seemed to fit her. It didn't feel out of place. Calico Princess was, without doubt, Shiron Booyacornish. Finding out the name that he wanted to know so much, Colio started instinctively smiling.

"It's scary when you suddenly smile like that."

"…Shiron Booyacornish. So that was her name."

"Did you by any chance not know who she was?"

Colio nodded.

"I feel like the situation is beyond my expectations…"

Saying this, Hamyuts suddenly rose up and went near the window.

"Hey, shall we go outside?"

As soon as she said that, Hamyuts got out through the window.

"Huh?"

Colio ran and poked his face through the window, looking down.

"C'mon."

He heard Hamyuts's voice coming from above. Grabbed by his collar, Colio's body was lifted. She lightly picked him up using only three of her fingers.

He was flung onto the creaking wooden roof.

"The view here is really bad."

Hamyuts said. Colio didn't feel intimidated from her like just before. She might have become less vigilant towards him.

"I wonder if you've fallen in love with her."

He was surprised that she suddenly guessed this. But he didn't know if it was true.

"Hmph."

Despite not answering anything, she could understand by his expression. She snickered while looking at his face.

But suddenly, Hamyuts turned terrifying eyes towards the distance. Although her facial expression hadn't changed, she turned from a meek and ordinary woman into a fiendish warrior.

"…H-Hamyuts Meseta."

"You may call me Hammy-san."

Her tone was light, but she emanated a quiet intimidating feel. Her mouth was like that of a docile wild beast but her face had some anxiousness to it. His instincts made him want to scream, as if teaching him the overwhelming differences between them.

After about fifteen seconds, Hamyuts seemed to lose her tension.

"Probably just my imagination. For a moment there I thought someone was coming. Well, never mind."

He couldn't understand at all.

"Hamyuts Meseta. I want you to tell me about her. Who was Shiron?"

"I don't see any need to tell you."

"Please. I want you to tell me… I have to know about her no matter what."

Hamyuts thought for a while.

"…Fine. I'll talk. But what should I… oh."

"Huh?"

"Oh, I know what. I'll tell you. That woman's name was Shiron Booyacornish.

She was mostly known as the Ever-Laughing Witch."

"…"

"Around 250 years ago, there was a widespread disease known as Dragon Pneumonia."

"Is that even relevant?"

"At that time, Shiron Booyacornish was called a savior. She was honored by the title of Ever-Laughing Saint.

But, it was only for about a year."

"Just a year?"

Hamyuts started narrating Shiron Booyacornish's story with a slow tone.

In 1923, during the naval assault operation, Hamyuts found the fragment of a Book. Management of Books was her duty. She immediately recovered that fragment.

The owner of the Book was named Shiron Booyacornish. Her alias was the Ever-Laughing Witch. Even now, it was one of the most hated names in the world.

She had strange hair, like the fur of a tortoiseshell cat.

She had a calm and noble face.

She wielded the invincible Shlamuffen.

Contrary to her terrible doings, she was a beautiful, lovely girl.

The era she lived in was around 280 years ago.

One day, at the Rona Kingdom, the fossil of a large crystal was found. Trapped inside it was the corpse of an ancient dragon.

It was valuable. The king loved it very much, and the fossil crystal became a national treasure.

But that was the beginning of the catastrophe signaling the downfall of the country.

First, the king died. After that the queen died, and following her all of their sons. One after another, the royal family died from illness as if decreed by the heavens.

Their symptoms were all the same.

A cough without any phlegm, the rapid decrease of body temperature, paralysis of the digestive system, and strange black bruises on the throat. Every medicine had the opposite effects from what was normal, and no matter how robust the patients' bodies were, there were no signs of any natural healing. People were scared. That disease was supposed to be only a legend that became a mere fairy tale.

They called the disease Dragon Pneumonia.

It was a disease created from nothingness by Past God Bantorra during the end of the Paradise Era in order to defeat an evil dragon.

The illness was born from Bantorra, the governor of death, so its killing power was tremendous. The evil dragon was wiped out in an instant. However, as it was too strong, it started baring its fangs towards the people and the Gods as well. The Gods sealed the disease and sent the pathogen beyond the skies. As a consequence of his sin, the Past God was sealed inside the ground.

The pathogens of Dragon Pneumonia were supposedly gone from this world. However, that dragon was trapped inside the crystal while still carrying the disease.

Shortly after decimating the royalty, Dragon Pneumonia spread into the world. It was the God’s disease. It spread frighteningly fast.

People started panicking. Dragon Pneumonia carriers were either isolated or mercilessly killed.

After half a year, about a twelfth of the population died, and the disease spread to a fifth of the world.

It was then that she had appeared from somewhere.

Her name was Shiron Booyacornish.

She was a peculiar woman who had a powerful magical affinity and a strange colored hair; a strange woman who never stopped smiling cheerfully for an instant.

Shiron gave medicine to those who suffered from Dragon Pneumonia. Everyone doubted her sanity. People shouldn't have had any cure for the disease created by a God.

But the cure was real. The sick that were administered this drug made a full recovery in a matter of days.

When people asked where the medicine came from,

"From a thousand years in the future."

Is what Shiron answered.

Her prediction ability was absolute and unprecedented. Until then there was not even a person who could see a hundred years ahead, and she already exceeded that by a tenfold.

Shiron said that in a thousand years men would become able to change the immunity system itself using the power of science.

Using that technology, creating a wonder drug for Dragon Pneumonia was simple.

Nobody could understand the scientific principles behind it, but the fact that the wonder drug existed was easy to understand.

Shiron built her own pharmaceutical factory, and began making and selling the drug.

The ingredients were not known in the present.

Although the medicine was quite expensive, it wasn't what most people worried about. All of the rich people began buying it, and those who were good hearted also gave it to the poor.

The kings, the nobles, the priests, the Armed Librarians, all praised and revered her as a saint.

They gave her all kinds of gifts and prestigious titles.

Shiron was named the Ever-Laughing Saint.

The fragment of the Book depicting the Shiron of that time was left on the boat of the Indulging God Cult.

Hamyuts had already read it.

A wide room about as large as a dance hall was cluttered. On the walls, memos were firmly attached and on the floor were bundles of paper. Inside the bottles lined on the shelves were insects and other small animals that were still alive and wriggling while immersed in chemicals.

Shiron was wearing simple white clothes and looked at the inside of a flask.

A strange smile appeared on her face. It was a gentle and lovely smile but it somehow didn't make one feel at ease.

"…It's stable."

"Yes."

Said a bald middle-aged man that could be seen next to her. He looked like a composed man with some status.

"Until now, we could only make about one every ten minutes, but with this method, our work efficiency can be five hundred times more than that."

Shiron returned the flask to the holder and plugged it. And then she took various items from the shelves and arranged them on the desk.

"Then I'll make 1000 portions for today."

The bald man then talked to her.

"Ever-Laughing Saint. I have said this countless times, but if you will give me the formula, I can also make the cure. I ask you to rest. Lately, you have been sleeping at neither day nor night."

"…No. It is fine. You will be too busy helping me."

"That is not good, you mustn't be so rash, it is a waste."

The bald man insisted.

"I appreciate your sentiments."

Shiron replied coldly. The bald man tried pressing her more.

"I cannot allow this. Do you not understand? If something were to happen to you, the world might come to its end."

"I'm fine. Your lives are more important."

"No, that's not what I meant…"

The bald man tried begging.

"I implore you. Please give us the formula."

“I ask your pardon. It is troubling.”

“We are the ones troubled! Please give it to me!”

Shiron stopped her hand that put medicines on the scales and pointed with one finger at a notebook on the floor.

“Look inside of that.”

“Oh!”

The man immediately took the notebook.

“I will copy this down! Let me burrow it for a while.”

He walked away with heavy steps.

When the bald man was gone, Shiron’s smile immediately vanished.

“Oh dear, that won’t do.”

At that moment, a voice resounded from empty air. The voice spoke towards Shiron.

“Wyzaf.”

“I told you. The remedy is an absolute secret. Those who know of it must die.”

The Magician Wyzaf appeared. Shiron replied to him,

“I am aware of that. The book is a fake.”

“What!”

Wyzaf made a forced loud cry and hit his forehead while laughing.

“What a terrible misunderstanding.”

“…Wha-”

The tweezers fell from Shiron’s hands.

“It can’t be!”

“It was because I was careless.”

“Baron!”

Without listening to Wyzaf’s words, Shiron started running. But, Wyzaf who was stalking her like a shadow whispered to her.

“It is useless. He was erased.”

“No…”

Shiron, who was about to open the door, stopped.

“It seems you did not foresee this conclusion.”

“This is…”

Shiron stood and covered her face.

“In your habit of looking a thousand years forward, you became distant to what is nearby. That is your nature.”

With the voice of laughter, Wyzaf’s voice grew distant.

Incidentally, the man killed was the Chancellor of the Great Yubeon Kingdom of the time.

A year after this, Shiron’s fame suddenly reversed.

Her trial began abruptly. Most of those listening first cried that it was impossible.

Shiron’s charges were the attempted destruction of the world. More specifically, her waiting for Dragon Pneumonia to infect far and wide and letting a total of a million people die.

She knew the method to make the cure far before Dragon Pneumonia spread around the world. But on top of having monopolized the formula, she refrained from selling it and waited for the number of sick to grow so the price would be high.

The people were furious. Everyone had lost family members or acquaintances. If Shiron would have sold the medicine from the beginning, most would have been saved. The people’s anger wanted some form of outlet.

There was no reason to deny the death penalty. The trial concluded in a mere hour. Within the angry roar of the populace, neither the defendant nor the prosecutor could be heard.

Hearing the judge declare capital punishment, the people cried with joy.

After two hours, Shiron got into the guillotine.

From the trial up to the execution, she hadn’t tried to resist at all.

Her neck, still dripping with blood, was pierced by a spear and paraded in the public square. The headless body, stripped of clothes, was thrown into a camp of violent criminals and shamed even further.

The enormous fortune she had built up was confiscated by the state. A war even occurred while attempting to confiscate that money made by selling medicine, which according to some accounts was more than three decades of the national budget.

Strangely, all documents that described the making of the wonder cure for Dragon Pneumonia completely vanished afterwards. Furthermore, all those who knew of it were erased, and their Books were erased as well.

Even now, the identity of the criminals was not known. But it was almost certainly done by the Indulging God Cult.

The Book of the time of that trial had been stored on their ship.

"In other words, Shiron-dono… does that mean you deceived us?"

"Exactly, Chancellor Feelea."

Shiron said.

She was wearing not a dress, but men's clothing and a leather jacket. They were clothes that ignored looks and went for functionality instead – probably her battle attire. She stood straight, aligning her heels together.

In the dim room, while lit by a seven-branched candlestick, Shiron was talking with the man.

He was an elderly man who wore the white clothes of a Chancellor over his black priest's garbs.

The man held his face with both of his hands, gazing up to the heavens.

"Oh God… This is too much for me…"

"Chancellor Feelea. This is an urgent matter. Wyzaf already knows of my betrayal. In a short while we're going to be surrounded by soldiers."

"But Shiron-dono, I…"

"We have to go the King to publicize the facts. Come, quickly."

The Chancellor said,

"…When this is revealed to the public, what will happen to me?"

"I do not know."

"Please tell me this is a lie, Shiron-dono. If they found out I greeted you… those terrifying Indulging God Cult people will…"

"You need not mention the Indulging God Cult."

"That is true, but…"

"Anyway, we don't have time. As long as I have Shlamuffen I will not lose, but this doesn't hold for the King and the other people. Once they target them instead of me, it will be hard to defend them."

"I understand. Someone, prepare a carriage!"

He rang the bell, but there was no one to answer. He tried once again, but nobody came.

"Is there no-one here? Where did they go?"

The Chancellor tried going outside, but was stopped by Shiron. She swung Shlamuffen to the right and stuck it next to the door.

“Chancellor Feelea. It seems they made their first move.”

“What…”

“I will protect you. Let us escape.”

“F-fine.”

Chancellor Feelea hurriedly grabbed a spear that rested on the wall and took his jacket off.

“I will go on ahead.”

“I will fight too. I may look like this, but I was once young.”

“There is no need.”

“But by yourself…”

“My Magic Blade Shlamuffen cannot be defeated.”

Shiron wielded the sword. Shlamuffen made a sound that sounded like laughter. The air around Shiron started crackling.

“Defile, Shlamuffen.”

Shiron ordered and the sword loudly laughed.

At that moment, a strange line ran through the air. It was as if invisible birds flew away at extremely high speeds, or perhaps a giant without any form scratched at the air – the line was without any color or shape.

The line began madly tearing through the walls and ceiling.

People started screaming. There were already enemy soldiers outside the room.

There were the screams of people who were thrown around like trash.

A few dozen people were killed this way.

However, the number of soldiers waiting outside was ten times of that.

Shiron shouted towards them,

“Retreat. No person can win against the Magic Blade Shlamuffen!”

This was already proven to not be mere bravado. The remaining soldiers were seized by fear and couldn’t move.

“…Go ahead. Aren’t your lives cheap anyway?”

A voice came from behind. Whether the soldiers heard it or not, they desperately charged forward.

"….tch."

Shlamuffen was swung. Once again some soldiers fell like puppets that had their strings cut. However, they didn't stop. Even those whose chests were slashed used their spears as a crutch to walk forward.

"…Shiron-dono."

Chancellor Feelea spoke from behind. He held a spear with his trembling hands. He became frightened of the tragedy occurring outside as well as the smell of flesh and blood.

"Do not come out!"

"…But…"

"You are the only one who can judge me!"

Shiron wielded her blade for the third time. The blade's line dancing in the air accurately took out the lives of even more soldiers than before.

The soldiers who saw it was impossible to come near used their bows.

Hundreds of arrows clashed with the blade's line that was like a wall and fell apart.

"Bows will not reach her. You must thrust with your spears."

In accordance to the voice coming from the behind, the soldiers brandished their spears.

"The one to judge you will not be that manservant behind you, Ever-Laughing Princess. It will be me."

A voice echoed from empty air. That voice belonged to the Magician Wyzaf.

"Silence, Wyzaf."

"Die, Shiron."

Shiron wielded her sword in the direction of the voice without any hesitation.

With blood endlessly pouring on the ground, the battle was just heating up.

Some time had passed.

"I'm your lawyer, Executive Official Rowme. Pleased to meet you."

"Pleased to meet you. I'm Shiron Booyacornish."

She sat on a shabby wooden chair while wearing a thin robe and introduced herself to a man.

Her long hair that was colored like a calico cat looked like it hadn’t been taken care of for a long time.

Her bare feet that were covered by dirt seemed to have received a slight frostbite from the cold stone room’s floor.

She was a prisoner.

“…I believe you are aware of this, but in six more days a trial will be held with the King, the Chancellor, the People’s Representative, the Priesthood and the Armed Librarians.

Compared to all of those, I will be your only ally.”

“Thank you very much. I apologize for you having to go through this hard work.”

“That is fine. I protect the legitimacy of the state's trial system.”

Executive Rowme said with a solemn face.

“I must assert that I have no idea how you can escape capital punishment. At one point, there were also those who believed in your innocence. However, due to the evidence you have submitted yourself their numbers are almost entirely gone.”

“Right.”

“You must be fairly represented in the trial.”

“Right.”

Executive Rowme appeared to be a fair and serious person. Shiron seemed to think that was not bad at all.

“In order to reduce your penalty, you must surrender. And you have to first mention you destroyed that repulsive Indulging God Cult and their chief Wyzaf.”

“…Right.”

“Also, there’s the fact that without you the world would have been destroyed. During the evaluation, even they will have to listen for a bit to those that want to reduce their penalty.”

“I see.”

“You must make a thorough appeal. You have that right and I have the ability.”

“Executive Rowme-dono. It is a rude question, but did you lose any one you know?”

“…”

Executive Rowme’s couldn't answer.

“You haven’t.”

“Only people I knew by appearance.”

“Even if we explain everything with logic, the people’s anger will not subside. Rather, it will just increase further. That would be dangerous.”

“…”

“This is enough. Executive Rowme. I am already contented.”

“Do you intend to die?”

“I intend to be judged.”

“…But why. You are… you said you were contented.”

“I thank you, but it is unavoidable.”

Shiron’s expression was weirdly calm, and she didn’t look as if she was afraid of her impending death at all.

Hamyuts found the two fragments of Shiron’s Books together with the terrorists’ memoirs. According to them, there had been a third fragment. Following that, the following sentences were written:

“One of the Saint's Books was left for Cigal Crukessa. Because it is unnecessary for us, we gave it to him free of charge. He will gain some profit using the cure for Dragon Pneumonia.

Money is just the means for us, but it seems to be the goal for Cigal. He will probably do anything for it.”

And, on their horrifying ship, there were people infected with Dragon Pneumonia sealed inside crystals. Also, there was some evidence that a hole had been dug through the crystals recently.

The Armed Librarians immediately acted.

Hamyuts ordered dispatching her subordinates to various places to look for clues about Cigal Crukessa.

Hamyuts explained Shiron’s story. Finally, she added,

“By the way, do you know about the sword Shiron used?”

“I don’t.”

“You really don’t know a lot, huh. Well, there’s merit to teaching someone like that.

So, that sword is called the Ever-Laughing Magic Blade, Shlamuffen.

It was used by the killer Angels as a weapon, and the sword attacks or defends by its own volition.

The sword's attacks are said to transcend cause and effect – it separates the cause of "cutting" from the effect of "being cut". That's probably a bit difficult to understand. Simply put, it involuntarily cuts whatever draws near, and involuntarily blocks any attack. It's amazing.

But on the other hand, since that function doesn't work when the blade is not extracted, it's weak against surprise attacks.

It's a mixed blessing.

Shiron-chan found it sealed at some lake's bottom and used it, but since she died the sword's whereabouts are unknown. Are you interested?"

"…Not at all."

Colio honestly answered. He was only interested in Shiron herself, so the sword she had been using didn't hold any meaning while being separated from her.

"Hmph. Oh well."

With that, it seems the story about Shiron ended.

She spoke a lot, but since it was in an orderly manner it was easy to understand.

"What are you going to do now?"

"You don't have to worry about that. I will figure out something."

"Not that. I'm talking about her Book."

Hamyuts scratched her head, looking troubled.

"Well, we'll take care of that little by little."

And she immediately changed the topic.

"By the way, I feel sorry for you, Colio-kun. You've fallen in love with that girl.

But you can't kiss her and you can't go on dates."

She said mildly. It was clearly not a pitying tone of voice.

"According to one account, Shiron was threatened by someone. It was thought to be false, but according to the Books you and those guys had, it looks like it's the truth. Seems like Shiron-chan was following that Wyzaf guy's orders."

Hamyuts kept scratching her head.

"But even then, it's hard to think of her as doing nothing wrong. Shiron holds the responsibility for over a million people dying. It sucks that she's called the Ever-Laughing Witch but she had it coming."

"…That's wrong."

Colio murmured.

“It’s not. Shiron definitely was a part of the Indulging G- oops, I shouldn’t say anything about that.”

“?”

“Sorry, I messed up. Shiron definitely cooperated with Wyzaf, whether or not she wanted to. It’s not that she was unrelated to those events. I do think it’s a pity, but that's irrelevant. No matter how much I pity her, she had to be punished for her crimes.”

Colio rebutted her.

“…That’s wrong. There were no crimes. That girl did nothing wrong.”

“You sure are stubborn, lover boy. If you’re too insistent you’re going to be hated.”

“That’s not it… she did nothing wrong. Even if no matter how many hundreds of thousands died, that doesn’t matter at all.”

A vein popped in Hamyuts’s temple. Her jesting tone disappeared.

“Oh? Colio-kun, did she really do nothing wrong?”

“It’s because those who died weren’t humans, they just pretended to.”

“What do you mean by that, lover boy?”

Hamyuts asked, and Colio explained.

“Humans are splendid beings. No one has the right to hurt or grieve humans, and they live without hurting or grieving anyone.

But in practice there are those that are hurt or become hated. While they appear human, those people aren’t human at all.

Humans are precious, but their imitators aren’t.

Killing or hating humans is unforgivable, but nothing matters when it comes to fake humans.”

Colio said. Hamyuts was quietly listening to him. Colio found it eerie how she, who had been talking senselessly just a little ago, was silent now.

“Did you think of that?”

“…No. I was taught this.”

“Don’t you think that’s strange?”

“I don’t see any problem with that.”

“Why?”

“Because I’m a bomb.”

This time, his words already failed him somewhat, but Colio didn’t notice it.

Hamyuts messily scratched her head.

“Hmm, I really hate that.”

Hamyuts stood up, swaying.

Slowly balling her hand into a fist, she punched Colio in the face. Colio felt as if his bones were twisted by that blow. Blood dripping from his nose colored the lower part of his face.

“Stupid. Just because I was a bit nice you lowered your guard?”

Her tone radically changed. Hamyuts grabbed Colio’s collar and lifted him high.

“This is my real nature. Do you understand?”

Hamyuts’s smile changed. From a peaceful smile that looked like someone basking in the sun, it became the smile of a cat playing with the inner organs of a still-living mouse.

“Brat. I planned on killing you, but I changed my mind. I’m going to let you live.”

After saying this, Hamyuts struck his face with her head. She kept holding him with one hand and repeatedly hit him as if hammering a nail.

Hamyuts’s forehead was as hard as steel. Colio felt his brain numb with each blow, and he withstood it while clenching his teeth.

“So you won’t even scream, huh. You sure are as strong as an adult.”

She left Colio’s body.

“I just want to say that it’s not that I’m angry. If I was angry you would have become minced meat covered in shit.”

Colio who was lying face down raised his head towards Hamyuts.

“But the only thing I love about guys like you is how you’re so passionate and reckless.

So, I’ll ask again. Is Shiron-chan a splendid human and all of the others that aren’t human might just as well die?”

“Right.”

“So, you might just as well die, too.”

“Right.”

“Fine then. I’ll do you a very kind favor.”

“Huh?”

“I’ll make you carefully think about humans.”

Saying this, Hamyuts pressed down on Colio's face with the force of a vise. She didn't even think of him as an opponent of the same league. It was as if a giant had trampled him.

"Don't move. If you move I'll break off one of your ribs. If you scream I'll gouge out an eye."

Hamyuts pressed one leg on Colio's arms and the second on his stomach. He couldn't move.

She slowly opened his shirt.

A devilish hand crept on his now bare chest.

She reached directly inside his body, and he struggled with pain. Hamyuts looked at this state from above.

“Mm, ugh, gwahhhh, ahhh, ahhh!”

Colio cried. Hamyuts on top of him didn’t move an inch.

“How horrible. It’s such a simple structure. This is a really sloppy job.”

While digging up the stone as if it was inside butter, Hamyuts examined the connection of the copper wires.

“How about this?”

Some spark ignited inside the chest and smoke rose from it. She forcefully pulled her hand out accompanied by sizzling sounds.

Hamyuts held a vacuum tube between her fingers.

As she flicked it away with her index finger, a small blue flame momentarily appeared and vanished.

“I think that’s it. Now the bomb can’t be used. You’re not a bomb anymore. You’re human.”

Ignoring Colio who was left drooling while collapsed, Hamyuts stood up. Her tone returned to normal.

“See ya, boy. If you live we’ll meet again.”

Hamyuts headed to the opposite side of the roof and prepared jumping off.

Even while lying down stunned, Colio summoned up his voice.

“…Wait, wait.”

Hamyuts turned around.

“Relia… is Relia still alive?”

“I don’t know who Relia is, but you’re the only bomb left alive in this town. No, that’s wrong. There aren’t any more bombs.”

“…I see.”

“See ya.”

Hamyuts jumped from the top of the roof. He couldn’t see her anymore.

“Oh no.”

After getting far enough that she couldn't see Colio's inn anymore, Hamyuts stopped.

"I ended up talking about delicate things related to the Indulging God Cult."

Because she planned on killing him, she didn't mind. She should have killed him now. But turning back now would be troublesome. Besides, she had already said she would let him live.

"…I'll seal his memories later."

Saying this, Hamyuts started walking.

Hamyuts had the bad habit of putting off simple work when she had a major job ahead of her.

Colio was sitting stunned inside his room. He felt stinging pain in his chest accompanied by nausea.

But, the emptiness caused by the loss of his bomb was filled with emotions.

You're not a bomb. You're a human.

Relia would have probably been pleased to hear this, Colio thought.

No, maybe he wouldn't have been pleased. After all, he lived as a human from the very start.

He didn't become a bomb in the first place.

Colio caressed the bomb inside his gouged chest. Now that it lost the vacuum tube that was its core, it was nothing but a burden.

"…Am I human?"

Colio muttered.

And then, he understood.

Why did he think he was a bomb? He believed that humans were beings without any pain or sorrow.

Colio didn't want to become human.

As long as he was a bomb, he wasn't afraid of anything. By just thinking "because I'm a bomb" he would dispel any suffering and even the fear of death.

Because he was going to die anyway, nothing mattered to him.

But now that he was human, the pain of having no goal and the loneliness of nobody loving him weighed heavily on Colio.

He didn't have any hopes, freedom, or happiness.

It felt as if his legs were going to crumble apart.

He had neither future nor past. He had no place to go to and nothing important to him.

It was emptiness that ruled Colio.

He only had memories left.

Only the memories of Shiron's Book.

There were the sounds of someone coming and knocking on the door from outside. It was the innkeeper.

"Can I talk to you?"

"…"

"Since the modern world is dangerous, I don't really want to get involved in strange matters."

"…"

"So, umm, honestly I'd like for you to get out."

"…"

Without saying anything, Colio started packing.

He didn't have any place to go to.

Chapter 5: A Husk, an Enemy, and the God of Death's Disease

Colio was wandering around town. He kept walking throughout the entire night.

Where was he walking to up to now? Where was he heading to? His feet were tired and he had nothing. Colio sat down by the roadside.

As he did, a lone man came from the other side of the road and talked to him.

“Good morning, boy. Would you like a Book?”

It was the illegal Book seller.

“…Huh?”

“You want some Books, don’t you? Got some money?”

The man pulled out a Book from inside his clothes. It seemed like he had it in a hidden pocket.

“This one belongs to that lady with the strange hair. Do you want it? I set it aside for you.”

“For me?”

“Yesterday, some really scary lady with sandals came to me. She asked if I had Books.”

That was probably Hamyuts.

“But, I told her I don’t have any as far as I know. She was pretty insistent, but she ended up losing herself to my enthusiasm and backed off. That’s how I protected this Book. So how about it? It’s cheap.”

“I’ll buy it! Right now!”

Colio passed his wallet. The man took some money out of it and returned it to him.

Without even waiting for the man to leave, Colio opened the Book.

Her form immediately appeared before his eyes. That moment was utter bliss for him.

She appeared to be younger than he ever saw her before. Her body was delicate and she was shorter. She looked to be around Colio’s age right now.

She was sitting on the floor.

Wearing a red dress, she hugged her knees on the carpet while looking ahead.

A wide bed that looked like ten people could sleep in it inside a wide room. A soft carpet decorated by fruits that looked like one could sink into it.

"…"

Shiron took a rough breath. Her forehead was sweating and her makeup was running.

"…"

She was looking at a glass shard placed on the carpet.

She grabbed it and brought it straight to her throat,

"Ahh… Uu…"

It was stopped on the verge of hurting her. The trembling edge of the glass touched her windpipe.

Shiron took another breath. She stared at the ceiling while starting to bleed from the small wound on her throat. She moved the glass blade to her carotid artery, stroked her windpipe, and then poked the opposite side of her artery.

She stopped cutting, and after she did, she once again brought it to her throat.

"…ah, ah, aah…"

The glass knife fell on the carpet. Shiron's red-gloved hands held her throat, and she kept taking heavy breaths while stunned like this.

"…I can't do it."

She said.

"I can't I can't I can't I can't I can't I can't I can't I can't I can't I can't I can't…"

She kept muttering this while turning her empty stare to the ceiling.

At that moment a man opened the door without knocking, and entered. It was Wyzaf. He also looked considerably younger than in the Book Colio read before. But his arrogant face and the feigned politeness of his tone haven't changed at all.

"I have good news, Shiron-sama."

Shiron raised her sweaty and tired face.

"…"

"Is something the matter? Your face makes it look like another good thing happened."

Shiron shook her head. Her face had dried up tears on it.

"I've seen the future again. It's Dragon Pneumonia. Caused by your relic."

Shiron said in a terribly despairing voice.

"Oho."

Wyzaf stroked his chin in interest.

"Those are good news. It seems that fortune awaits for the both of us."

Shiron shook her head.

"…Let's leave the formula for the future. If we don't, it's going to be bad. It's going to be really bad."

"That is splendid."

"It's not splendid at all. Even Big Sister is in danger. My Big Sister…"

"Ho."

"Please, did I do something wrong? Isn't it fine? Please."

Shiron prostrated on the floor, holding her head. While looking down at her, Wyzaf said,

"Oh, right. We have found the Memorial Weapon at the place you told us of. As you said, it was a thin sword shaped like a spider."

Wyzaf opened the bundle he was holding. Inside it was what Colio had already seen countless times, the Ever-Laughing Magic Blade Shlamuffen.

"Wait, Shiron-sama. You said that it was called Ever-Laughing Magic Blade Shlamuffen, right? It is a splendid name."

He placed it in front of Shiron, but she didn't look at it.

"I can't do it anymore."

"…Oh my, what's wrong?"

Wyzaf placed his hand around his ear and drew closer to Shiron.

"I can't do it anymore, it's too much for me."

"Do what exactly?"

"I don't want to see it anymore. People dying. Lots of them. By Dragon Pneumonia. We can actually save them, but they're dying. Each time I activate my power I see lots of dying faces…"

"Well well."

"What happened to your promise? You said that if I told you about the cure we would save them."

"We will save them. That's obvious."

"Please make the cure. We only have one year."

"We can't do that right now. It's not profitable enough."

"That's not the problem…"

"But it is."

Shiron shook her head. Wyzaf talked while grinning.

“You seem to not understand why you are living like this right now. Everything is thanks to Dragon Pneumonia.”

“No, I don’t want that.”

“So do you hate it? Do you wish to return collecting straws to use against the cold during the winter? Do you want to return eating maggot-ridden dog corpses?”

“…”

“You may return if you’d like. We already have plenty of money.”

“I can’t do it. I want to die. I want to die. I want to die…”

“Why is that?”

“This is all wrong. I’m not happy at all!”

Wyzaf shook his head as if saying ‘oh dear’.

“Young lady, listen well. This is happiness. You are simply confused because you did not adapt to it yet. Come on now, let us play together. Today I will give you some extraordinary medicine and prepare some entertainment. With this rarity that we acquired in southern countries, just one sniff will make you feel like you ascended to heaven.”

“…”

Wyzaf grabbed Shiron’s hand and helped her get up.

“Here, come with me. You will soon forget everything and feel much better.”

Shiron already lost all of her will for resisting and allowed herself to be led away by Wyzaf.

Don’t take her, don’t take Shiron – Colio thought to himself.

But he couldn’t do anything.

The Book ended there.

At the moment the Book ended and he got pulled back into reality…

“You really are a bad boy.”

In front of his eyes was Hamyuts. The same instant he opened his eyes, the Book was snatched from him.

“I’m confiscating it.”

Of course, he didn’t want to give it up. But he knew he couldn’t do anything against this kind of opponent. Compared to Hamyuts, he was as weak as a flea or a fly.

Colio thought he would rather die while resisting. It seemed like a good idea. He didn't care about living anyway.

It would be far easier than staying alive like this.

She will surely squash him like a bug.

"No. If you want to die do it by yourself."

Hamyuts said, seeing through him.

"Why didn't you kill me?"

Colio asked.

"Who knows?"

Hamyuts lightly answered.

"Did you want to save me?"

"Do you think I've saved you?"

"…"

"I didn't think about saving you or about hurting you. I'm no angel or devil."

Hamyuts stood up.

"Well, see ya."

Hamyuts walked away in a fast pace. Colio remained alone again.

Colio wondered why he couldn't enter the Book. He wanted to become a resident of that Book so he could meet her. He wanted to talk with her. He wanted to save her.

Thinking this, Colio kept sitting by the roadside.

There was nothing he could do.

He didn't even have the energy to stand up.

"Hmm, so she also had some difficulties."

Hamyuts said while walking, and put Shiron's Book that she just finished reading inside her pocket.

Hamyuts already stopped thinking about Colio. For her it was simply one insignificant incident during the midst of battle. If Colio had the will and power to live, it would be fine with her if he lived. And if he didn't, he would just die. It was as simple as that.

More important than that was the upcoming battle.

No matter where she was, it was a battlefield. It might have been peaceful without anything happening yet, but it was already a battlefield.

All the adults were busy with their work. There were the many working miners; mine carts that went to and fro the tracks; whistling steam locomotives; housewives who were washing clothes and attending to their houses; and children who were playing around all of those.

Even while there was some fear due to the recent bombing incidents, life continued on as usual.

Next to Hamyuts, children were playing with a tortoiseshell-colored cat using a stick with a caterpillar on it. Hamyuts carefully passed by them, prepared for any attack. However, for other people she looked like she was walking normally.

Hamyuts let out a single Sensory Thread from her fingertip. It was connected to a woman who stood further ahead in a nearby road.

That woman stopped and looked around her at passersby countless of times. As she passed the same road twice and then thrice, she seemed to be wary of someone tailing her.

If someone was tailing her in a normal way, it would have been enough to shake them off. Unfortunately, it couldn't help her against Hamyuts.

Hamyuts estimated her destination and went there in a fast pace.

It was an abandoned house in the outskirts of town, after passing through the alleys.

On the roof of that house were four holes that indicated something had fallen through it.

Hamyuts entered that abandoned house and waited for the arrival of the woman.

She arrived outside after about five minutes, looked around her many times, and then entered inside.

"Hamyuts Meseta, I must kill Hamyuts Meseta…"

The woman was muttering this while walking.

And as she opened the rotting door,

"Uh-"

She raised such a small cry and covered her mouth.

She stood trembling in the deserted house due to the smell of blood.

The woman took a few steps back while holding her mouth. When she opened the central door leading to the living room, the woman screamed once again.

Inside the room were four corpses of women.

They were the corpses of the bombs Hamyuts shot down from the mountains when she first came to Toatt Mining Town.

The woman collapsed when she saw those corpses.

Hamyuts could even feel her teeth violently clattering from the back of the room.

After waiting in the back of the room, she opened the door and called towards the collapsed and trembling woman.

“I’ve waited for you.”

The woman’s eyes opened wide in astonishment due to Hamyuts’s calm appearance.

“As I thought, you were the one behind this.”

Hamyuts said. That woman was the innkeeper of the place where Colio and the rest lodged.

Ever since she arrived at the inn, Hamyuts had been keeping tabs on her.

That woman, Cigal Crukessa’s subordinate who watched over the bombs, spoke in a trembling voice.

“Why me…”

“That’s simple. You see, after I entered Colio’s room, you ran away at full speed.

Well, even without that I would have found out soon. When I came to visit it was like the place practically begged me to find it.”

After Hamyuts’s explanation, the woman resigned. Her trembling stopped.

And she took out a kitchen knife from her chest. Hamyuts didn’t react even though she saw it. An amateur handling cutlery didn’t scare her at all.

The innkeeper didn’t head for Hamyuts with that kitchen knife. She instead led it to the nape of her neck.

At that moment, Hamyuts’ finger moved. There was a dull sound as if she flicked the string of a cello. The woman held her wrist and the kitchen knife fell. It was a pebble Hamyuts flicked with her finger. Even without the sling, she could shoot with a force comparable to an ordinary handgun.

“You can’t selfishly die like that. You will only die after I make you talk about various things.”

“…to Heaven…”

The innkeeper muttered.

“I am going to Heaven. I will not go to that cold Library.

I didn’t manage to kill you, but the cult always held some compassion for me.

My Book will be by the side of God, so it serves you right!”

Saying this, the innkeeper bit her tongue.

Hamyuts didn't try to help her as she convulsed with blood dripped from her mouth. She didn't even finish her off. She just looked down at her in silence.

Hamyuts muttered,

"There's no such thing as Heaven."

That voice held no anger, sadness, contempt or pity.

It just had a slight emptiness to it.

Hamyuts passed by the still convulsing body of the innkeeper and left the abandoned house.

After that, Hamyuts headed again for the inn Colio was in. He wasn't there anymore. Since that place had no other customers other than Colio, it felt as if it turned into ruins in the matter of hours.

She opened a file cabinet inside this now ownerless inn. She only found guest books and accounting books inside, but without getting discouraged she checked them page by page.

While turning the pages of the guestbook and looking at the names inside, Hamyuts's hand suddenly stopped. And she flipped to the previous page to confirm the facts. She noticed the same person had been staying inside the same room three times within two months. The room was next to the room Colio occupied. The name of the man was Fiboro.

Hamyuts headed for that room.

Using her Sensory Threads to poke around, she soon found what she was looking for.

One tile of the floor could be removed. A single piece of paper was hidden inside. Hamyuts took it.

"The death of Relia who was missing had been confirmed

Nothing abnormal with the others

Severance of contact with the Bohilin Company

Had been confirmed"

The handwriting definitely belonged to the innkeeper. It was probably a letter addressed to the man known as Fiboro.

She quickly found two clues.

That Cigal Crukessa guy didn't seem too much of a problem – was what Hamyuts thought.

And at that moment, Hamyuts heard a voice inside her head.

‘Director, I have some messages.’

The voice she heard in her head was due to Mirepoc’s special skill, the ability of Thought Sharing. It was a Magic that allowed her freely sending her thoughts to other people while transcending the concept of space.

‘First, from me.

I have briefly explored the area around Toatt Mountains, but I can’t see any traces of people from around town having been here. If the enemies have some hideouts, I believe there’s a high chance they are inside the town.’

That’s true, Hamyuts thought. She already found out one such hideout.

‘From Mattalast-san.

He conducted the investigation at the station, but for now hadn’t found any suspicious persons. Since the investigation is still underway, I will contact you as soon as something is found.

From the Headquarters.

They are checking the archives for Books that belong to people from around Toatt Mining Town, but there are no results right now. Over.’

Hearing this much, Hamyuts took out a small disk-shaped stone bullet from the bag at her waist. She scribbled something on paper she found inside the inn and then folded it. The stone bullet had a lid and was hollow inside. It was a bullet meant for conveying messages.

Hamyuts got on the roof, and shot it towards Mirepoc with her sling. The bullet flew high towards the summit of the mountain.

On the paper she had written the following:

“1) Investigate Bohilin Company. It’s connected to Cigal Crukessa. Try using the name of The Weasel’s Den Inn.

2) Find a man called Fiboro.

3) There is nothing out of the ordinary here. I don’t require any help.

4) If a boy named Colio Tonies leaves the town, restrain him just in case. He belonged to the enemy forces, but he holds no value for them anymore. He’s just a boy so there’s no need to worry about him.”

Taking out the bullet from the ground, Mirepoc read the message. She sent her thoughts forward.

‘Bohilin Company… They are an organization smuggling the Books from around here. I will talk to Mattalast-san and also ask him about Fiboro.’

Hamyuts nodded. Mirepoc’s decisions were fine.

The contact was severed and Hamyuts returned to look for documents inside the inn.

‘Mattalast-san, this is from the Director.’

Mattalast was on standby at a distance of about six hours by train from Toatt Mining Town – in the commercial city of Bujui. It was there that he conducted his mission to monitor those who entered and left Toatt Mining Town.

He received Mirepoc’s thoughts while he was smoking his pipe inside a small coffeehouse found in some corner of the city.

‘Please contact Bohilin Company. We don’t know what kind of opponents they are, so be careful not to recklessly attack them.’

‘Bohilin Company? Never heard of them.’

Mattalast sent his thoughts back. If a person was trained to some extent with this sort of special Magic, it was possible to send the thoughts back in this manner and establish a two-way communication.

Hamyuts, who was strangely clumsy despite her high combat capabilities, couldn’t do this.

‘There’s something I heard from Luimon since he was in charge of Toatt Mining Town. This town has several criminal organizations involved in things like trafficking Books and commercial trade in the downtown. That isn’t much, but…’

‘That’s good enough.’

Mattalast slowly brought the slightly cold coffee to his mouth.

‘How is the monitoring of the station going along?’

‘I’m cooperating with the sheriff. Should I leave it to them and head over?’

‘No. Please devote yourself to the work there.’

‘Understood.’

‘Also, did you perhaps find someone named Fiboro?’

‘No. I checked the records going back and forth to Toatt Mining Town many times. I’ve never seen that name.’

‘If you do, please let me know. It seemed like he’s related to Cigal.’

‘Fiboro, huh.’

While making rings of smoke with his pipe, Mattalast sent his thoughts back.

‘By the way, are you slacking off?’

Slight anger was mixed with Mirepoc’s thoughts. She probably felt some laziness from his thoughts.

‘I’m not slacking off. I’m taking a break.’

Mattalast answered shamelessly.

‘…Is that so?’

He could suddenly imagine Mirepoc’s disappointed face on the other side of the mountain.

‘Mirepoc, I can’t exert myself. I must preserve my stamina for the crucial moments.’

‘I’m simply asking.’

This seemed to be common with novice Armed Librarians, but Mirepoc was too serious. Mattalast thought being like that had some drawbacks, but he didn’t realize she also thought the opposite way about him.

‘How’s the Director?’

‘Seems like nothing happened.’

‘Really?’

‘Yes.’

‘Nothing, huh.’

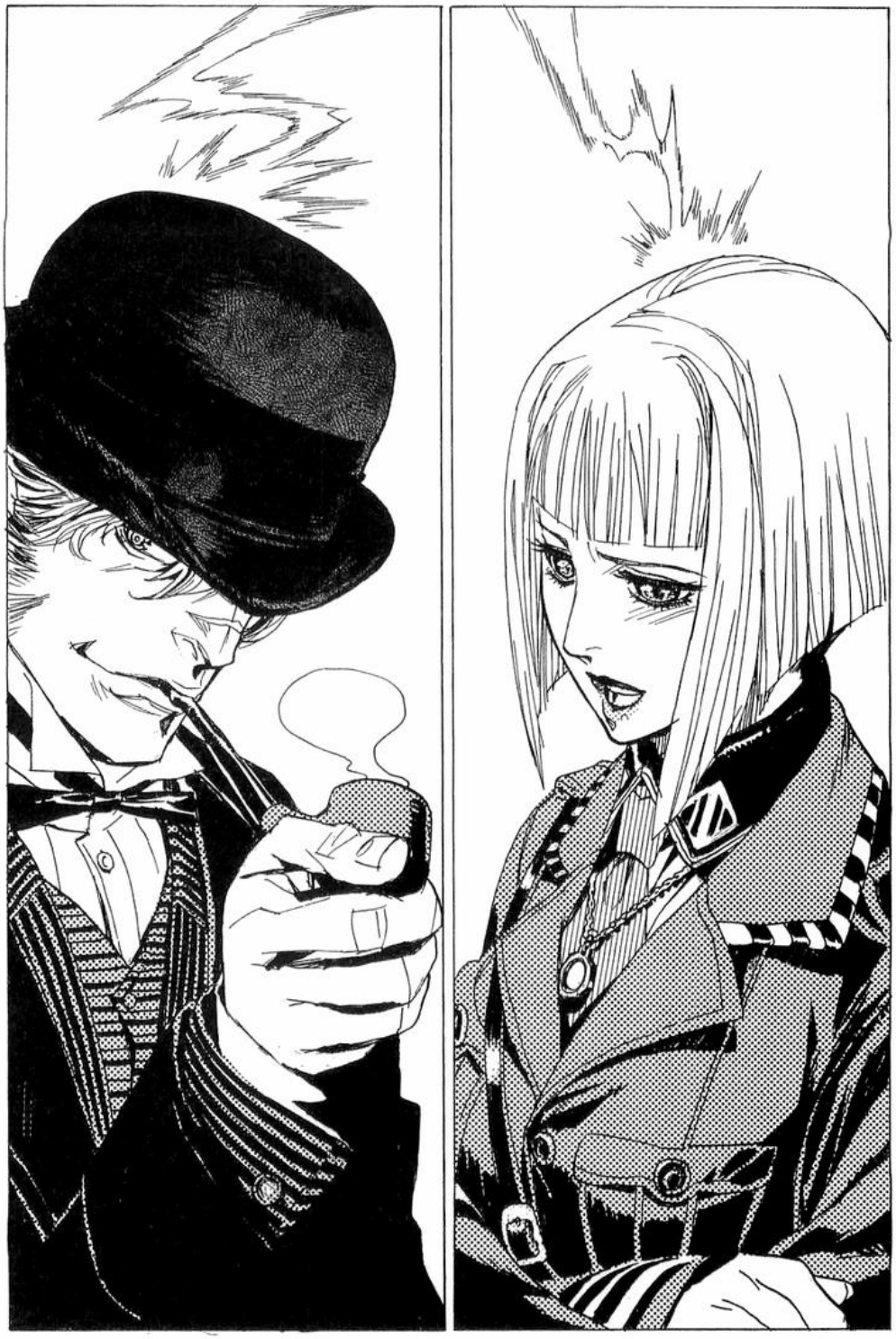
Mattalast seemed bothered by these words.

There were three possibilities to the meaning of those words. Something that was supposed to happen was prevented, nothing happened yet, or she didn’t notice anything happening.

Mattalast thought that saying "nothing happened" wasn’t the same as saying they can relax.

Mirepoc didn’t seem to notice that.

Besides, he was thinking about Hamyuts since yesterday and had a bad feeling. Even Mattalast himself didn’t understand why. He couldn’t calm down at all.



‘What’s wrong, Mattalast-san?’

Mirepoc asked, perhaps having received those feelings.

‘It’s nothing. But even though it’s nothing, I can’t seem to calm down.’

‘Why?’

‘I don’t know, I’m just uneasy.’

She probably felt that. Mirepoc transmitted her puzzlement.

‘Did you have some bad premonition?’

Mattalast’s Predictive ability was exceedingly precise. Mirepoc knew this.

‘Yes.’

‘It can’t be that the Director is going to be defeated?’

‘That’s not it.’

He thought, but then reconsidered.

‘…No, that might be it.’

‘Can’t be.’

‘I think so as well, but…’

Mattalast left a bill of ten kirue on the table and rose up. He didn’t receive any change. He placed his black bowler hat on his head and left the place.

‘But, how will the Director lose?’

‘Even the Director’s not invincible.’

‘She seems practically invincible.’

Mirepoc, who has seen Hamyuts in action several times, came to believe in her combat capabilities almost as if worshipping her.

‘If someone around my level were to fight her within a distance of 100 meters they have a chance of winning.’

Mattalast replied.

It was just as he said. If a warrior of a similar caliber to him engaged Hamyuts within that range, it was dangerous even for her. She, who specialized in ultra-long range attacks, was not very good in close combat. Well, even then she would be about evenly matched against a strong warrior like Mattalast.

‘But how will they get near her?’

‘…’

Mattalast didn't think about that. If one could only have a chance for victory within the distance of 100 meters, it meant they couldn't if it was more than that. And Hamyuts's range was more than 200 times of that. If it was only 100 meters, it would be like fighting unarmed against a gun. No, it would be worse. Normally there would be no chance for victory.

On top of that, Hamyuts had her Sensory Threads. It was nearly impossible approaching her while deceiving her eyes.

'A typhoon is coming.'

Mattalast thought.

The weakness of Hamyuts who boasted being the strongest was the wind. She would not be able to control her Sensory Threads, and her deadly sniping would have its hit rate plummet.

'Mattalast-san. Wasn't it you who said the typhoon wouldn't come here?'

'We're talking about a hypothetical situation. Sometimes even predictions deviate.

Especially during unusual situations like the one right now, someone with a low Predictive caliber like me can easily be fooled. Don't compare me to the Ever-Laughing Witch.'

'But, even if the typhoon does come, it's unlikely the enemy will know to take advantage of it.'

Mirepoc was right.

If the typhoon came by chance, there was a possibility Hamyuts would be in danger. However, it was impossible for the enemy to use that chance deliberately.

'A typhoon might come, the Director might come to Toatt Mining Town at that time, and thus the enemy might have a chance to win… I would have never bet my life on something so uncertain like this.'

'…Me neither.'

'It will be fine. Everything is going well. There will be no problems.'

'Might be so.'

As expected he was just overthinking this, Mattalast thought to himself.

But, even if he reached that conclusion, he still couldn't calm down.

He felt as if there was something they were overlooking.

A wind blew, and some leaves were caught in the brim of Mattalast's bowler hat.

The wind started getting stronger, he thought.

"Hmm, I don't like this at all."

Hamyuts murmured while walking through the main street in Toatt Mining Town.

After having mostly finished searching inside the inn, she began moving towards the station Luimon used before to look for more clues.

Everything indeed seemed to go well as Mirepoc thought. But perhaps it went too well.

It wasn't as if the enemy couldn't attack. And it probably wasn't that he didn't arrive yet.

Possibly, the attack had already begun.

Just the fact that the enemy didn't attack wasn't dangerous by itself.

But she could feel danger in that lack of danger. Hamyuts thought this contradiction was the essence of this battle.

Suddenly, she found the figure of Colio. He was still crouching down on the roadside. He appeared to not be doing anything, just sitting still.

Hamyuts glanced at him only once and passed to the next street. After she did, she quickly forgot about him.

Mattalast was thinking the same as Hamyuts.

It was possible the enemy had already escaped, but he didn't think an opponent that went to such lengths by preparing bombs to challenge the Armed Librarians would be one to flee so readily.

If he really was so stupid to think he could kill Hamyuts using bombs, it was truly regrettable that someone like Luimon died in this affair.

Mattalast was in front of the headquarters of Bohilin Company. It wasn't a hideout, but a very normal three-story stone building. It looked a bit like a bank or a trading company.

Mattalast took the gun from his waist and rang the doorbell while pushing his body against the wall.

There was no answer.

"This is for the use of The Weasel's Den Inn. Open up."

He tried using the name of the inn Mirepoc passed on to him. He waited for a while. Nothing happened.

"Excuse me, I lied before, I am the Armed Librarian Mattalast. Open up."

He tried saying. Once again, there was no answer.

"Are they on break?"

Mattalast shot the hinge of the door. He quickly reloaded another bullet and pulled the broken door, going inside.

As he stepped inside, Mattalast understood why nobody answered. There was the smell of rotten meat and garbage, similar to that of spoilt vinegar. It was a smell even an Armed Librarian would not like despite their job.

'What's wrong?'

He received Mirepoc's thoughts.

'Mirepoc. It's too late. It seems the Bohilin Company people were taken care of.'

'Taken care of… were they all killed?'

'…From what I see, probably.'

Mattalast answered while looking around.

He didn't know the number of corpses. Without the spurts of blood and the putrid smell, it might have looked like an abandoned doll factory. But even if it were, it wouldn't calm him.

Mattalast saw one corpse. The Rigor Mortis had already passed, so it was cold and soft. A missing section of the body that was cut off already became dark red and was swarming with flies. The blood splattered on the floor was already dry and hard.

It was probably more than a week since their deaths. It was from even before Luimon's death.

Looking at the office's desk, he could see a map spread out. It was a map of Toatt Mining Town. Several places were marked by circles. In every circle something like 'three people' or 'four people' had been written.

One of the circles designated The Weasel's Den Inn, and it was also marked with an X of a different color.

Mattalast understood that was the place they deployed the bombs from.

They were used by the enemy, Cigal Crukessa, and probably forced to keep those bombs. No, maybe this was managed by Cigal himself.

After he had no use for them, they were all killed. Mattalast thought he was a terrible guy.

But why did he leave the corpses in this place?

It's as if he was asking to be discovered.

And…

Mattalast looked at the corpses lying here and there. Each and every one of them had been torn apart with no exceptions. There were those that, after their wrists have been carefully cut, were slashed over their elbows, and even those who were cut from the

shoulders down. It was too excessive for just killing them. Furthermore, they were all horribly clean cuts.

He wondered what kind of weapon was used.

From then on, the investigation continued without any significant progress for two days. They have found some small clues and unimportant details, but that was it.

Hamyuts left the town and went to the secluded mountain again.

Once again, she searched the entire town. Last time, she only searched for those that could be confirmed as enemies. But now, she looked for all points of interest or suspicious people.

Before looking for Cigal Crukessa, she wanted to find the source of the enemy's attack.

She emitted about a billion Sensory Threads. A significant amount of them were floating in the corner of the town – the slums area – and sent information from there to Hamyuts. There were ill-bred men, vagrants and escort ladies walking around. She searched among those.

At that time, a Sensory Thread touched a single woman.

The feel of her skin made Hamyuts shudder. It was enough to make all billion Sensory Threads disappear without her meaning to.

It was a strange coldness.

Once again, she extended her Sensory Threads to that woman. She patted the body of the woman… or perhaps she was only a bit above the age of what would be called a girl.

And then, Hamyuts rose up and started running with her full speed.

She knew the girl's name by touching the nameplate outside her apartment.

She was called Ia Mira.

That's strange, Ia thought to herself.

She thought that if she slept a little, her cold would be gone.

Because she had no fever, she thought she would be fine.

But, instead of a fever, Ia could feel her body temperature rapidly dropping.

Touching her forehead with her hands, it was cold enough to think that she already died, and yet she felt unbearably hot for some reason.

Her throat was sore. But even though she coughed, she had no phlegm.

When Ia drank water she felt better, but then her cough would become worse.

A while ago, she saw in the mirror that there were strange bruises on her throat.

Ah, I feel like I've heard about this illness before, Ia thought.

"Ia Mira-chan?"

There was a sudden voice outside the door.

She thought it was one of her colleagues that came for a visit.

As she tried to answer, she held her sore throat and tried standing up.

But the person who was outside the house entered on her own.

It was a woman she didn't know.

"I know it's sudden, but I'm Hamyuts Meseta."

"…Hamyuts?"

Ia thought it was the same as the name of the famous Armed Librarian.

"Because you don't have time to mentally prepare, please listen calmly."

The woman, Hamyuts, briskly walked towards Ia's bed.

"You caught Dragon Pneumonia."

"Dragon…?"

"I was infected now as well. Potentially a lot of other people in this town were, too.

Listen to what I have to say if you don't want to die."

Ia hurriedly nodded.

Just how long was Colio sitting there? Even his stomach, which didn't receive anything to eat for a long time, didn't growl.

People who looked at him with curious or pitying eyes passed by in front.

There were also people who exclaimed things like "So poor at such a young age…" but Colio didn't even raise his head towards them.

"You're not a bomb anymore."

Thus said Hamyuts. Was he a human now?

Hamyuts told him to "carefully think about humans".

But, Colio couldn't understand what a human was.

Are those that miserably sit down like this human? Are humans so worthless?
He couldn't understand anymore.

He just kept earnestly worrying.

Gradually, the wind around him became stronger and moist.

Colio thought that perhaps a storm was brewing.

Suddenly, he could see Hamyuts Meseta walking in a fast pace past him.

She should have seen him, but didn't even give him one glance.

He was already an insignificant existence for her, Colio thought to himself.

Since then, Mattalast kept searching inside that building that stank of death.

He had probably checked each and every document by now. Over the course of several days, he methodically searched for clues.

Apparently, Bohilin Company was joining a cult. But he found one letter addressed to Cigal Crukessa rather than to that cult.

If he could find more details here, they would probably come close to Cigal Crukessa's identity. Combined with the clues found by Hamyuts, they might be able to find him.

But as expected, he just couldn't understand why the corpses were left like this.

Also, he had no idea why, but every door and window was sealed by plaster from the inside.

It was as if they tried sealing the building itself.

But for what purpose?

While pondering about this, Mattalast continued his search in the putrid building.

At that time, he received Mirepoc's thoughts.

'Mattalast-san.'

'What is it?'

'A little while ago, I received a message from Director Hamyuts, though I haven't been able to confirm it yet.'

'Tell me the gist of it.'

'Umm… the enemy spread Dragon Pneumonia around the town.'

As soon as she said those words, all of his questions were answered. At the same time, he understood what kind of trouble he got himself into.

'I see, so that's it…'

Mattalast thought.

Corpses were scattered in the building. They were carriers of Dragon Pneumonia. The pathogens were multiplied in the corpses and thus spread into the air.

Any person who would come to search inside Bohilin Company would be infected in the blink of an eye.

The corpses were a trap. Mattalast was tricked by the enemy.

The effects of the disease were already just a matter of time. It won't be too long until he could no longer move.

'…What about the Director?'

'It seems like she was already infected. I'm still fine.'

'I'm already done for, too. The symptoms will probably start manifesting soon.'

Mirepoc's gasp was transmitted through the thought sharing.

'Don't be so distressed. Immediately return to the headquarters and get some reinforcements. We can prevent the spread of the disease in this town with a barrier.'

'But Mattalast-san, you and the Director…'

'We won't die that easily.'

'But…'

'Don't waste time. Go, quickly.'

'…'

For a while, it seemed like Mirepoc hesitated. But she understood that rather than the safety of the Director and Mattalast-san, she should prioritize the safety of the townspeople and prevent the spread of the disease.

'I will return as soon as possible. Please survive until then.'

Saying this, Mirepoc severed the connection.

Mattalast took a breath and tried to calm himself.

It certainly seemed like the enemy's plan fell into place. But, this didn't mean they lost yet.

Before he and Hamyuts would die, they would have to capture Cigal Crukessa.

Their forces exceeded his. He was just as cornered as they were.

And as he thought this, he remembered.

He felt like he was overlooking something.

Our forces?

Mattalast activated his Predictive ability.

He used it to predict the weather from now on.

Mattalast paled at the result of this prediction.

‘Mirepoc, answer. Answer! Answer!’

He tried sharing his thoughts to call Mirepoc. However, while he could receive communication from Mirepoc and reply to it, it didn’t work the other way around.

Mirepoc already ceased the Thought Sharing. Mattalast’s thoughts couldn’t reach her.

Nevertheless, Mattalast kept trying as it was his final ray of hope.

‘Mirepoc, answer! The Director’s going to get killed! The enemy’s aim isn’t Dragon Pneumonia!’

He received no response from Mirepoc.

Mattalast started running. He had to go and save the Director.

As he thought of this, an explosion resounded from his immediate vicinity. From a hole made in the wall, dozens of people came pouring in.

They all carried bombs.

“Kill Mattalast.”

“I’ll kill Mattalast!”

Shouting so, they kept running one after the other towards him.

“Some pawns still remained?!”

Mattalast took his handgun and started shooting the enemies. He shot six times in an instant. Six enemies who got their brains blown out collapsed.

He couldn’t let them draw near. Mattalast started retreating.

However, there were too many enemies.

They were not opponents he would lose to easily, but he wondered if he could do it with his sick body.

Please bear with it, my body– thus Mattalast prayed.

But, he had a hunch his wish was not going to be granted.

Mirepoc rushed to the airplane and turned on the engine. She had to return to the Library as quickly as possible and call reinforcements.

If, at that time, Mirepoc refused the pair’s instructions, the worst case scenario could have been avoided.

However, she flew away on the airplane.

If Mirepoc reinstated the Thought Sharing with Mattalast, the worst case scenario could have been avoided.

However, she didn't.

If she turned on the radio at that time, the worst case scenario could have been avoided.

However, as she revved up the engine, she didn't even think of the radio.

If Mirepoc was headed to the west rather than the east, the worst case scenario could have been avoided.

However, the airplane headed straight to east.

When Mirepoc noticed that worst case scenario, it was already too late to turn back because she wouldn't have made it.

It was inside an Armed Librarian office that was used by Luimon at Toatt Mining Town.

There, when Hamyuts turned the knob of the radio, she began doubting her ears.

The radio's special news reported the course of the typhoon.

"The large typhoon 'Captain Choke', which we reported earlier as heading to the northeast, suddenly changed its direction to the southeast, approaching a direct hit in the Toatt region. A typhoon usually can't come near the Toatt region, so a great deal of damage is expected to occur due to the delay of the anti-measures. The Science Agency and the Magic Agency assembled a special task force together due to this. They are investigating the sudden change in the course of the typhoon. The typhoon approaching the Toatt region is the first case of such an abnormal weather since 1809."

A typhoon, Hamyuts's mightiest enemy, was coming.

Hamyuts knew that she had been completely cornered now.

The enemy was yet to be found.

She also had not much time until the disease surfaces.

Furthermore, the two people who came along would not be able to come to her rescue.

And even her combat ability, which was the most dependable thing she had, was about to be sealed by the incoming typhoon.

Why?

Why had everything gone so smoothly?

It felt as if the enemy predicted both Hamyuts and the typhoon coming here in the first place.

But there shouldn't be any way for that.

Such a powerful Oracular Magician shouldn't exist. Not even the highest level modern Prediction users should have been able to predict the typhoon that was not supposed to come.

And yet, the enemy still did…

At that moment, everything clicked into place.

The enemy foresaw this day.

It was the history's strongest Prediction user, Shiron Booyacornish, who had foreseen this day.

The real enemy wasn't Cigal.

It was the Ever-Laughing Witch, Shiron Booyacornish.

At that time, Colio Tonies was still sitting at the roadside.

He neither knew nor wanted to know about Hamyuts's predicament or Cigal's plot.

He didn't care about anything anymore.

There was a knife in a hidden pocket inside his pants. It never was of any use.

But now, Colio took it out and stared at the blade.

He thought about dying.

"…"

Colio was tired of searching for any hope to live.

In spite of him having no hopes, why was he scared? He was afraid of dying.

"Kill Hamyuts Meseta" was engraved on that knife. Just a while ago, those words were everything for him. But now they meant nothing to him.

Thinking about it, only a few days have passed. He came here with Hyoue and Relia to kill Hamyuts Meseta. Relia probably died. Was he killed by Hamyuts? Or did he die in a different way? He couldn't know.

Colio didn't think of those two as friends or allies, but he still felt somewhat nostalgic.

At that time, he didn't think of dying as scary at all. He only thought of his life as a tool to kill Hamyuts and nothing else.

Why was he afraid now?

Did he change? No, that wasn't it.

He had tried to escape from the fear and pain. By thinking he was a bomb, he subdued his fears.

In fact, Colio couldn’t kill Hamyuts. He couldn’t use the bomb in his chest. He could only tremble.

Living was painful, but dying was scary.

Colio was simply sitting without being able to live or die.

The wind grew stronger. Clouds came out.

Chapter 6: A Storm, the Magic Blade, and Tortoiseshell

Half-eaten bread had been laid in front of Colio. He picked it up and ate it. It was already dry and hard.

His life had no meaning, but his stomach was still empty. While thinking about meaningless things such as whether it was better dying with a full stomach or not, Colio smiled a little.

Children ran on the road, and Colio looked at them. It wasn't because they interested them; he just instinctively looked at moving things that came near his eyes.

"There, it went there!"

"No, it's not here."

"Where did it go?"

"I dunno."

"Let's go back already…"

"The wind is getting really strong."

"It's probably going to rain."

The children were cheerfully playing around. Colio stared apathetically at them.

"Call it one more time."

"Ok, let's do it."

It seemed the children were looking for something. Thinking about it, they always seemed to have a cat with them. They were probably searching for it.

The children gathered together and shouted in unison,

"TOORTOOISESHEELL!"

Colio immediately stood up like a spring.

He remembered. That was one of Shiron's aliases that she told him of.

"That cat!"

The children were startled by Colio suddenly speaking.

"Who is that cat's owner? Where is it?"

It might have been a coincidence. But Colio wasn't calm enough to consider it.

"Huh? We don't know."

One child answered.

Another child raised her hand.

“I know who that cat’s owner is.”

“Hmm?”

“It’s mister Cartohelo!”

It was a familiar name. Colio asked again while thinking that it was unbelievable.

“Cartohelo Mashea?”

The girl nodded.

“Ia Mira’s boyfriend?”

She nodded again.

Hamyuts went out of the town to change her location.

She was at an abandoned storehouse far from the mines. There were no people around, and nothing too important to break. It wasn’t bad for a battlefield.

Hamyuts planned on ambushing Cigal here.

She had no way other than fighting and defeating him.

Although most of her power was sealed, Hamyuts didn’t plan on losing.

“…”

She took slow breaths and tried to concentrate.

She understood he was coming.

After all, his preparations were complete.

Colio headed towards Ia’s residence while asking people for directions.

The wind gradually grew stronger. Raindrops that fell like rocks began wetting his face. By the time his hair was dripping wet, he found Ia’s place. It was an attic room of a small apartment. It was residence for two people atop the narrow stairs.

“Cartohelo Mashea Ia Mira”

Their names were written on the door as if snuggling together.

Colio hesitated while standing in front of the door. Maybe he shouldn’t meet her.

But, even if his life had no meaning, he wanted to know more about Shiron. These feelings of his didn’t waver.

Even so, it was a nostalgic name. He met her just a few days ago, but it already felt like the distant past. Colio wondered how much has changed.

"…Hey, don't go there!"

As he was thinking about this, a voice resounded from the bottom of the stairs. He turned around and saw a man that was probably one of the neighbors.

"You can't go near that apartment."

The man said.

"…Why?"

"I don't know. The Armed Librarian Hamyuts Meseta came here and said this. Anyway, you can't enter."

"I see."

Colio pretended turning back, and when he saw the man wasn't there anymore, he returned to the door and knocked.

There was no reply.

After hesitating a bit, Colio opened the door and entered.

"…Hamyuts-san?"

The moment he opened the door, he could hear Ia's voice. Colio was surprised to hear her mention Hamyuts.

Then, there was the voice of a violent cough.

The place was filled with the stagnant smell of body odor characteristic of a place with sick people in it.

"Ia Mira?"

Colio called.

"…Who is it?"

It seemed like Ia didn't remember his voice. Colio went further inside. When Ia saw his face, she raised an eyebrow. She seemed to recognize him, but she couldn't understand the reason for his visit.

"…You're…"

"…Umm…"

Colio was stumped. Even though he suddenly stormed inside, he didn't think about what to say. He was flustered.

"Why're you…?"

"…A lot has happened."

Thinking a bit, Colio said only this. Ia was perplexed.

Colio looked around. It was a narrow room.

There were only one bed and a closet. Next to a single table were two chairs. There was barely enough furniture for one person, and it was apparent that two people have lived here.

Ia was lying in a somewhat wide bed. Her complexion didn't look bad, but she had dark circles under her eyes and her expression seemed vacant.

At that time, something entered the room, went through Colio's legs and rubbed against his shin.

"Oh, Tortoiseshell."

"This cat…"

"It's my… no, Cartohelo's cat."

Ia stretched a hand from the bed and stroked the back of the cat.

"Well then, get out now. I don't know why you're here, but I'm sick. Those were the instructions of the Library Director Hamyuts-san."

"No."

"You have to."

Ia coughed.

"…I'm going to die."

Hearing her talking about death, Colio felt some response in his heart.

"What happened?"

Colio asked.

"Dragon Pneumonia. It's hard to believe, but it's true."

"Dragon Pneumonia…"

"Please don't tell other people about this. It'll cause panic. She told me to stay here and let no one come near."

After saying this, she coughed again.

Colio recalled Shiron's Book. She said it – that another breakout of Dragon Pneumonia will happen in the distant future.

But, he didn't think that it would happen right now.

"So just leave. You'll die."

"…No, I won't go."

Ia looked troubled.

“You really are a strange person.”

Colio also felt troubled hearing that. He certainly was a strange person.

But more importantly, he wanted to breach the main topic.

He came here to ask about the cat. It seems that it was named Tortoiseshell. As he thought about how to breach the subject, Ia started talking with him instead.

“Hey, is it true you had a bomb in your chest?”

“…”

Colio nodded. He was surprised, but it was probably Hamyuts that told her of this when she came over.

“Was it made by bad people?”

Colio wondered how he should answer that.

“But you don’t have it anymore. That’s what Hamyuts-san said.”

Colio nodded.

“So, everything’s good.”

Ia said while smiling. Despite them being almost complete strangers, she seemed to be really happy for him.

But Colio couldn’t feel honestly happy about her feelings. Since he thought he would rather be killed by Hamyuts, not being a bomb anymore wasn’t a good thing.

“I don’t know if that’s really good.”

Ia was surprised.

“Why?”

“I don’t know what I’m going to know from now on.”

“Why?”

“…”

Ia’s question didn’t hold any ill will against him. But it was a question Colio couldn’t answer.

He couldn’t even describe how he was living thus far.

“Sorry, it was a weird question.”

“…Yeah.”

“It’ll be fine.”

"…I don't know."

It was a vague answer, but it was the only thing he could answer.

Colio noticed that talking with Ia strangely calmed his heart. Perhaps Ia felt the same way when she wanted him by her side for a little while during their previous meeting. He couldn't really understand.

"So, why did you come here?"

Colio thought back. He didn't come here for small talk with the sick.

"That cat…"

When he wanted to point at it, it had already gone off to somewhere else.

"Where is it?"

"Ever since Cartohelo was gone, Tortoiseshell doesn't stay here a lot. What's the matter with it?"

"…Why did you name the cat like that?"

"Why do you ask?"

Colio faltered. But he didn't really need to be secretive. Did he have a reason to hesitate?

"A person I know was called by the name."

"…You're talking about Tortoiseshell? That girl with the striped hair?"

Ia was surprised, and so was Colio.

"…How do you know about her? That Book was Cartohelo's."

Hamyuts felt a single man approaching. He was a well-dressed gentleman.

In his hand he held a small crystal ball.

He appeared to be unarmed.

One person.

The storm was becoming full-fledged. His prestigious suit was wet by the rain and the hair on his back disturbed by the wind. Hamyuts was also similarly wet.

The distance between them was about 200 meters. It was within her range, but Hamyuts didn't attack.

Hamyuts couldn't hit anyway because of this wind. Also, she wanted to see the face of the man who managed to corner her like this.

"Hello."

The one to begin talking was Hamyuts. The man showed his face from behind the storehouse.

“Hey, Hamyuts Meseta.”

Despite the two meeting to kill each other, it was a peaceful, gentle, and normal greeting.

As the two faced each other, Hamyuts talked.

“So you’re Cigal Crukessa.”

Cigal smiled as if she said something that didn’t even need asking.

“I wonder if I should say “nice to meet you”. Your Sensory Threads already touched my body countless of times. It was actually very unpleasant.”

It was as he said. He was one of the people she suspected of being Cigal Crukessa. However, she didn’t manage to find any concrete evidence of that until now.

Hamyuts thought that if she had some more time, she would be able to ascertain it soon.

But she didn’t have any reason to be thinking about that right now.

“Do you have Shiron’s Book?”

“Yes, right here.”

The man said and presented the crystal in his right hand. There was indeed the fragment of a Book sealed inside. With that, he was able to evade Hamyuts’s Sensory Threads.

“I wonder if the cure for Dragon Pneumonia is written inside.”

“That’s obvious.”

Cigal smiled. Without taking into account the current situation, it looked like a charming smile. He seemed to be good at attracting people.

“Hey, can I ask you something?”

An exceptionally strong wind swept in the space between the two. Their clothes fluttered. A nearby pile of timber collapsed and leaves danced in the wind as if they were knives. Cigal seemed to be a bit unsteady, but Hamyuts stood unperturbed as if it was a mere breeze.

“What is it? This rain is horrible. I’d like to wrap this up as quickly as possible.”

“What are you going to do from now on?”

Hamyuts’ question could be interpreted in many different ways.

“Hahaha. You can’t even understand that?”

“It can’t be that you’re only going to kill me.”

“If you knew why did you ask? You sure are foolish as expected.”

The blood rose to Hamyuts’s head a little. But she didn’t lose her composure in that anger. Rather, she was the type of person to clear her mind when she became angry.

“So, you just wanted to kill me?”

“Exactly.”

Cigal spread his arms.

“Do you understand? At least the fact that you’re a hindrance to us.

The only thing dangerous to me in this world is your sniping ability. So I wanted to quickly eliminate you.”

“I see, that way of thinking isn’t too bad. That’s why you lured me here.”

“Right. Since I sealed your sniping and got within this distance, I don’t have anything to fear.”

“So the bombs were simply used to buy time?”

“Bombs? Ah, right, I did prepare such things. But they don’t really mean much.”

“Aah…”

Hamyuts sneezed and rubbed her wet nose.

She lifted her dripping hair and rubbed her face.

“I changed my mind. I originally thought about letting you live if you were to beg for your life while crying and wetting your pants.”

Hamyuts started swinging her sling. The spray of water droplets became a fine mist.

“How vulgar. You’re really disgusting.”

“Die.”

Several pebbles flew in the air. The string of Hamyuts’s sling spun around in speeds that couldn’t be seen with the naked eye. She threw the pebbles immediately as she caught them in midair. They became deadly bullets that assaulted Cigal in a straight line.

“How useless.”

Cigal said. A split second before he was turned into minced meat, the high-speed pebbles were shattered to dust.

“Wha-”

Hamyuts raised a voice. When did it happen? Cigal’s hand now held another thing inside a crystal.

He held an iron sculpture shaped like a spider.

From its rear a silky blade swiftly extended.

Cigal said,

“Defile, Ever-Laughing Magic Blade Shlamuffen.”

The crystal was broken. The spider hilt fell into his hand.

As expected from what was seen inside the Book, and as expected from the name that Shiron gave it, Shlamuffen started laughing.

An invisible line was engraved in the air.

Hamyuts flew to the side.

The space she had been occupying a second ago was ripped to shreds.

“Haha.”

Looking at her, Cigal laughed.

Hamyuts didn’t immediately counterattack. She turned her back and ran. While running, she shot at him.

Pebbles were thrown with a powerful rotation. The air resistance made the trajectory of the gale of bullets rotate.

The line of fire drew a semicircle as it aimed for Shlamuffen in Cigal’s hand from the side.

However, it was once again scattered into fine sand.

The figure of Hamyuts was already out of Cigal’s sight.

Water sprayed around with the sound of her speeding up and running along puddles.

Hamyuts was going around the perimeter to look for an opening.

Cigal couldn’t follow her with his eyes.

He turned around as he felt a presence from directly behind him and an attack came from the opposite side.

Despite Cigal not being able to react, the pebbles became dust and scattered in the air.

“Tch, over there?”

At the moment Cigal swung the Magic Blade, Hamyuts had already switched her location. The attack only served to turn the raw material around them to scraps. A mountain of piled timber became wood splinters.

Hamyuts’s next shot attempted to hit the unguarded enemy.

But once again, it disappeared without any sound.

Hamyuts and Cigal were clicking their tongues at the same time.

The fight kept going relentlessly.

While fighting, Hamyuts evaluated Cigal's abilities-

His speed and the way he carried his body.

His eye movements.

His competence and judgment in using his weapon.

Putting all of those together, Hamyuts reached the conclusion that Cigal's capabilities were several levels below hers. He was probably even below Armed Librarians such as Luimon or Mirepoc.

His reflexes did indicate that he received some battle training.

However, he only had the strength of a human that never exerted himself to the point of vomiting blood even once.

His reactions were dull. His defenses were loose. His sense of danger was lacking.

When viewed from the eyes of the battle-able Hamyuts, he had plenty of clear weaknesses.

However, in this situation where the storm sealed Hamyuts's battle capabilities, close combat was her weak point. And the Magic Blade Shlamuffen filled the gap between their battle strength and began reversing the tide.

Colio knew that the storm became full-fledged.

The sound of something crumbling came from somewhere.

Colio didn't know if this was due to the storm blowing something off or due to Hamyuts fighting.

She was probably currently battling against the mastermind behind the people like him and Relia. However, both Hamyuts and the mastermind had no connection to him anymore. He was abandoned by the both of them.

"Umm, try looking in the top shelf."

Ia said while lying on the bed.

"It's probably there."

Colio opened the cupboard. It was messier than he imagined. He started looking inside.

"Hey, Colio-kun."

While he was searching, Ia talked with a hoarse voice.

"Cartohelo died because of a bomb, right?"

Colio stopped his hand and turned around to see Ia raise her head from the bed.

“Yeah.”

“…Did you see it?”

“Yeah.”

She was silent for a while. Colio was staring at her.

“But you didn’t kill him.”

“…It was an accident. We tried helping him.”

“I see…”

Ia’s expression indicated she wasn’t sure what she should do. She seemed to search for some outlet for her overflowing emotions.

“What did he say in his last moments?”

“Huh?”

“If you heard him, please tell me. I want to know.”

“…”

Colio didn’t answer.

When Hyoue exploded Colio did his best to escape the blast. He couldn’t hear anything.

Also, inside of that explosion, what would he say? He didn’t think anything was said.

“I see. Sorry.”

Ia, who understood the situation from Colio’s silence, apologized in a lonely-sounding voice.

“Why did you ask?”

“We had a promise.”

“What promise?”

“That we’d call each other’s names as we die.”

“…”

“But it’s fine. If he did say anything, I’m sure that he did it.”

Ia, who probably didn’t want him to see her expression, turned around in bed.

“I’ll definitely say it as well, so that’s fine. But if I’d said such a thing to Hamyuts-san she would be angry.”

She turned around again.

“Oh, right. It's also somewhat relevant to Tortoiseshell.”

“What do you mean?”

“Hmm, maybe I shouldn’t explain it. You’ll understand when you see the Book. So find it.”

She was right. Colio continued his search.

“Thinking about it, I wonder what the name of that girl is. She must have had a proper name. Do you know it?”

Colio instantly lied.

“I don’t know.”

“…I see.”

If he told Ia, she would probably detest Shiron. It made Colio sad. For as long as possible, he didn’t want her to know about Shiron. For as long as possible, he wanted her to like Shiron.

Then, at the topmost shelf, he found a small piece of a Book about the size that would fit inside a spoon. It was probably left there for a long time since it gathered some dust. It was the same kind of ashen dust that drifted from the chimneys of this town.

Colio asked,

“Can I read it?”

And Ia answered,

“Sure.”

Colio extended his slightly trembling fingertips.

The wind was becoming stronger. The storm was shaking Ia’s small apartment.

His fingertips touched the Book. He felt as if it whispered that it was waiting for him.

While circling the town, Hamyuts was thinking.

Just how much time passed since the start of their battle?

Was it an hour or two?

She could feel her legs, thighs, and calves stiffening with fatigue faster than usual.

Even the weight of her wet clothes felt like it restrained her.

She ran on the roof of a house, jumped on walls, ran on the ground, and danced in the air. While running around, Hamyuts kept attacking.

She couldn’t win from close range. Even a distance where they could see each other by eye wasn’t good enough.

She had to gain as much of a distance as possible.

Feeling the signs of an attack, Hamyuts jumped away. The space she occupied just then was assaulted by Shlamuffen, and she ran away with all of her strength.

How troublesome, Hamyuts thought.

Logically, even when including Shlamuffen, Hamyuts's battle capabilities exceeded those of Cigal. If she could gain a sufficient distance, spend some time on accelerating the stone bullets and shoot them from ultra-long range at full power, she would probably be able to blow through Shlamuffen's defenses. Shlamuffen's range was at most 50 or 60 meters. If she could gain distance, it wasn't an enemy to fear.

But, she couldn't gain that distance now.

As long as Shlamuffen's attacks did not surpass hers, she could easily hit Cigal. In the first place, Hamyuts's specialty was a long range surprise attack.

However, she just couldn't buy enough time to do that.

It wasn't an opponent she couldn't beat. But right now, and only now, Hamyuts's chances of victory were slim.

A storm comes to this town only once per century.

Cigal secured this small chance of victory that can only occur once a century.

He's an opponent worse than crap, but I'll give him credit only for that part, Hamyuts thought.

She kicked the door of a house open. The couple and their children who were inside nearly fainted. She immediately grabbed them and threw them out of the window. The attack arrived immediately after. Half of the house was chopped apart and collapsed. Hamyuts covered her face in order to shield her eyes from the falling debris.

"Alright."

She could faintly hear Cigal's voice. Seeing the chance, she shot a stone from within the rain of debris.

However, it was also scattered in vain. Hamyuts instantly ran away through the broken wall.

There was an uproar in town. Hamyuts shouted with a hoarse voice to not go outside. She was reluctant coming to places which had people in them. However, while running around, she had no choice but to come here.

While evading the attacks of Shlamuffen, Hamyuts didn't have any leeway of going back to the forest.

She was barely able to keep fighting.

Her evasion seemed to be ever so slightly faster than Shlamuffen's limit. She somehow avoided the attacks. But, while Shlamuffen will never tire, Hamyuts was

getting worn out. Before long, her feet will probably stop as if they were rusty wheels screeching to a halt.

To make matters worse, right now she had no way of attacking beyond Shlamuffen's defense.

Her irritation and impatience hastened her fatigue. She would have to grasp victory before her fighting spirit and her rational judgment would become exhausted.

However, Hamyuts was already tired. Her body wanted to rest.

Her heating body, getting chilled by the rain, wanted some time to calm her heart.

She stopped while trying to gain some distance.

Seeing that, Cigal also stopped walking.

"What are you planning to do?"

Hamyuts said. She tried hiding her rough breaths.

"…What do you mean?"

"Your motive is already clear. Or do you think you can trick me like Shiron?"

"Hahaha."

That laughter made Hamyuts angry.

"Is there any need to hide it? If you want the cure, you can get on your knees and beg. Maybe I should just get rid of a nuisance like you, though…"

"…You idiot."

Hamyuts uttered.

He was a foolish man. He had some talent but was imprudent and superficial. He was a man weak of heart. Since he had time to waste on that useless banter, he should have attacked already.

What was that guy's plan in the first place? Does he think that by possessing the cure he can make people do his bidding? He only concerned himself with bombs and slaves, so he probably didn't really understand humans.

Was she going to lose to this sort of opponent? While thinking this, Hamyuts rushed ahead.

"Well then, die already."

Hamyuts leapt ten meters backwards. With that movement, she barely evaded the attack.

The opponent she needed to defeat wasn't Shlamuffen. She had to target the one holding it, Cigal.

He said that Hamyuts's sniping was scary.

When the wielder is completely unaware, Shlamuffen shouldn't be able to activate its defensive capabilities.

She had to create an opening.

She had to find a chance to disappear from Cigal's consciousness.

It didn't matter that he was a third-rate opponent. He was an opponent who carefully prepared to such an extent just to kill her.

Was that even feasible?

While hesitating, Hamyuts ran. *Look for it. Think. You have to find an opening*.

The rain became lighter.

The sky was quickly covered by clouds.

The Book opened.

Colio's consciousness was pulled back 250 years in the past.

A girl was crying. With her back against the wall, near a gutter, the girl was crying.

She was probably around ten years old. She seemed to be in the slums area. Obscene words were scribbled in mud on the wall.

There was no one near her. Her surroundings were dim, the sun was setting, the city was bleak, and her hair was striped like the fur of a calico cat.

"Hey, Big Brother. You and Big Sister in the far future."

She began speaking. There was no answer. But she kept talking to herself.

Shiron seemed to be waiting for a reply. She kept talking as if losing her patience.

"Hey, please answer, Big Brother and Big Sister. I see. So Big Sister is called Ia? And Big Brother is called Cartohelo."

Shiron talked in a small, conservative voice.

"Please help me."

Shiron was silent for a while, as if waiting for an answer.

"I have only seen sad and painful things. I don't know what I should do. Why should I live? Do I have no other choice?"

The girl kept talking to someone who wasn't there.

"Just why… I will make a lot of people suffer. I don't want that. But I can't escape. I can't escape no matter what I do. Besides, I'm going to be taken by bad people. Because I don't want to be poor."

While saying this, Shiron's eyes became moist again.

"…What am I supposed to do? Since I have no reason to live, what should I do?

Tell me. I'm watching. Yes, show it to me. I can see both Big Brother and Big Sister."

The young Shiron then waited for a while. Her tortoiseshell colored hair suddenly swayed.

Colio understood she activated her Prediction ability.

"…Thank you, Big Sister, Big Brother. I don't really know right now. But someday I will."

The young Shiron was smiling shyly. Once again, her hair moved.

"Yes, it's like this with that person.

I don't know his name, but I do know what kind of person he is.

He's strong. He's really strong.

There's a stormy day. I saw a really stormy day.

That person, while covering up for a woman, will carry a small knife and call my name."

A faint smile appeared on her face wet of tears.

"That person's going to watch the sunset with me. This is much later, when I'm already an adult. Yes, we will watch it together. Isn't that amazing? I'm going to watch the sunset with that person."

Shiron seemed happy.

The Book ended there. It was a terribly short Book.

Colio opened his eyes.

For a short while, he was at a loss for words.

"That girl knew our names. Isn't that strange?"

Ia said.

"Cartohelo was really worried about that girl. He said he wanted to help her somehow, and when he tried saying something to her, she spoke to the both of us."

Ia talked in a gentle voice, as if feeling nostalgic.

"We didn't know why that girl suffered so much, and even if we knew we couldn't do anything. Maybe she really had no other choice besides bearing that pain.

But because we were thinking that we can't do anything to help her, she started talking to us.

We couldn't do anything besides giving her advice."

"What did you say?"

Colio asked.

“We told her that one can’t find a reason to live on their own.”

Ia smiled.

“No matter how much you’d think about it, it was impossible to do alone. If you’ll live by yourself, it will just pain you.

Even if you think you are living alone, if you have someone being nice to you, you are never truly alone. That’s what we said.”

Ia’s words permeated Colio’s very being.

Along with it a strange feeling rose in his chest.

He felt a strange sense of unity as if Shiron was at his side listening to Ia’s words.

He felt a peace of mind that they shared the same feelings.

He felt a sense of freedom as if the wall of time that separated him from Shiron was demolished.

“It’s not difficult at all. Even I and Cartohelo, who can’t really accomplish much, can do only this.

We are never separate.

Even if it seems like we are far apart, he’s actually always by my side.”

That’s it, Colio thought.

Shiron thought this way too, for sure.

“Shiron.”

Colio let that name out of his mouth. He called her as if she was next to him. He didn’t think about calling her in this manner before.

He always thought of her as being far away. He always thought of her as unreachable.

No matter what he did, no matter what he said, Colio thought she was truly unreachable.

But that was wrong. She always was right here.

She was looking at Colio.

She was living next to him.

Right.

He lost his allies, lost his bomb, but he kept on living because Shiron was there with him.

Thinking that Shiron didn’t exist anywhere was a mistake. Colio always lived with her inside his heart.

What should he be doing from now on? Colio knew the answer.

He now understood the meaning of the words he heard long before.

There was no mistake. Those were Shiron's words, after all.

"…I'm going."

Colio said as he returned the Book to the cupboard.

"Where to?"

"To a place I must go to no matter what."

While saying so, he searched his pants. It was there.

The only belonging Colio had left. It was the small knife passed to him when he first came to town.

Feeling its cold surface, Colio thought it would be good enough.

He didn't need anything else anymore.

"Where are you going?"

"I don't know. I'm probably going to fight."

"With whom?"

"I don't know."

"Why?"

Colio thought for a bit.

"Because Shiron is there."

"…"

It was a puzzling answer for Ia.

However, she didn't press him any further.

Colio's feelings were transmitted to Ia far clearer than his words.

"Thank you for bearing with me. I'm really… right. This is all thanks to you."

Colio started walking.

"…I don't really understand, but I'd prefer if you said it was thanks to Cartohelo."

"I see. Right. It was thanks to Cartohelo and you."

Colio was heading outside, into the unceasing storm. While seeing him off, Ia sent words of parting.

"…Thank you. Take care of yourself."

"You take care of yourself too. You have to."

Colio left through the front door. Then, he started running.

At some point, the rain stopped.

Shiron mentioned a place where a precious person was lost.

He understood where it was.

It was the place where the person who led him to the answer, as well as a friend that didn’t become his friend, were lost.

Final Chapter: A Sunset, Shiron, and Colio

The rain had already stopped at some point.

The wind was still strong, making the hectic clouds drift from east to west.

Cigal carefully parted the hair that clung to his forehead. At his feet was Hamyuts, who fell on her knees while clasping her sling.

While looking down at her, Cigal pulled out a match from the waterproof cigarette case in his pocket and rubbed it a couple of times. Water somehow got inside during the battle and thus it only emitted an unpleasant smoke.

Cigal threw the match away. Seeing that, the kneeling Hamyuts grinned.

“Such a pity. Even convicts on the death row are gran…ted one final smoke.”

Hamyuts cringed at the pain of her wounds.

Since it even interrupted her words midway, they lost all impact.

“Come on, attack me. Are you scared? You are, right? That's obvious.”

Hamyuts continued. It was a bluff. Even with her strong body and her physical strength that was further aided by Magic, she couldn’t move her legs anymore.

Looking down at Hamyuts’s state, Cigal spoke.

“Aren’t you going to beg for your life? You loser woman. Raise your rear like a dog and beg.”

“…You piece of shit.”

Hamyuts was thinking – *which attack got me?*

Just now, the right side of my body was cut pretty bad. I can't move like this. Since it hit from my right shoulder to the navel my right breast is practically cut into two. Well, but that isn't really the problem here.

The fact that the toes on my right foot were cut off is also bad. Only the joints of my little pinky remained. My wounds are buried in mud and sewage is coming in touch with my veins. Right now my head feels hot, but when it cools down it'll surely be painful.

It's pretty bad that I cut the tendons in my right ankle when I turned my body. That took care of my right foot.

My head was also hit quite a lot. Maybe I should review the basics of landing safely? My finger is also bleeding… it's because I left the sling wrapped around it.

I made a terrible misjudgment in my strategy as well. If the typhoon was going to pass so quickly, I could have also devoted myself to running away.

Oh well, she stopped thinking. *That's it.*

Cigal was grinning as he looked at Hamyuts.

“Hmph, that’s enough. Die.”

Cigal slowly raised Shlamuffen.

Hamyuts clenched her sling.

She wanted to at least try and take him down with her.

She couldn’t let the bastard who killed her stay alive – that was all.

“…”

Hamyuts looked at her surroundings. A newspaper was dancing in the wind. Broken wet branches lay on the ground.

She didn’t notice it until now, but they were near a vacant lot in the outskirts of town. Around them were scrap iron, wood and coals.

Hamyuts noticed that the ground had the traces of an explosion, almost completely erased by the rain and the storm. One of the bombs prepared by Cigal probably detonated here before.

She thought that her last view was rather dull.

“Hamyuts Meseta!”

Then, she heard a voice. It wasn’t the voice of one of the nearby residents who already ran away from danger.

Both Cigal and Hamyuts looked at the voice’s direction. A human pushed his way through to enter this superhuman battlefield.

This out-of-place intruder was gasping for breath, and talked in a calm voice.

“Wait. I’ll do it.”

The intruder was a boy. He was short and had a slight hunchback. His hair was overgrown and grizzled.

His grey linen shirt became slightly wet in the rain.

“Who are you?”

Cigal asked.

“Colio Tonies.”

The intruder simply stated his name. And he was standing in front of the kneeling Hamyuts as if to protect her.

“Colio… who exactly are you? I can’t recall.”

“One of the bombs made by you guys.”

“Well, well. So you’re still alive? Some of you are tough after all, huh.”

While grinning, Cigal withdrew Shlamuffen’s blade.

Hamyuts searched for an opening there. But this wasn’t enough yet. Cigal was still vigilant against her.

“It sure is convenient… Colio, was it? Alright, that’s perfect. I’ll give you the honor of killing Hamyuts.”

Cigal smiled and pointed at Colio’s chest.

“Kill her.”

However, Colio didn’t move. Cigal looked puzzled.

“What is it? Quickly detonate yourself.”

Colio didn’t answer.

“Why did you brat come here? You’re in the way. Scram.”

Hamyuts said towards Colio’s back.

“What are you trying to do? It’s none of your business. Get outta here. Quietly go away and then you can live or die or whatever.”

Colio didn’t answer Hamyuts’s words either. She scowled at his back.

“What is it? Do it already. Well, I guess I can give you some time to enjoy yourself. Even if I think this world is worthless, there are still all kinds of people I want to see. Hahaha, this feels good.”

“You’re in the way. Scram, Colio. If you stand there I can’t kill that piece of shit.”

Colio slowly but carefully opened his mouth.

“Shiron’s Book…”

Colio started talking to Cigal. Hamyuts was completely befuddled.

“Do you have Shiron’s Book?”

Cigal shrugged.

“What are you saying? It’s nothing to waste time over.”

“So you do have it?”

Colio pressed further. Cigal looked like he didn’t want to bother answering.

“…Do you want Shiron’s Book? Are you stupid? What’s a shitty brat like you trying to do?”

Hamyuts said from behind.

“I do want it, but right now it doesn’t really matter.”

“What?”

Colio pulled a single knife from his pocket.

“I came here to fight.”

Both Cigal and Hamyuts were at a loss for words at the sight of him holding a knife.

The one trying to interrupt the battle between the owner of one of the Memorial Weapons, Shlamuffen, and the world’s strongest sniper, was an amateur brandishing a knife.

Even when viewed from the eyes of Hamyuts who was far detached from common sense, it seemed ridiculous.

“Are you stupid? Do you think you have a chance? Do you really think you can win?”

Hamyuts said the obvious thing. Colio answered her,

“…I can’t win against an opponent that even you lost against. Even if I were to fight him thousands of times, I still wouldn’t beat him.”

Colio clenched his knife. He stared at Cigal, who stood about seven meters ahead of him holding Shlamuffen.

Cigal looked at Colio, grinning.

However, despite the overwhelming difference in their abilities, Colio didn’t waver.

“That’s why I’m not the one going to fight.”

“So who will?”

“Me and… Shiron.”

At that moment, the blowing wind grew weaker. Neither Cigal nor Hamyuts noticed that fact.

They only paid heed to Colio.

“How are you planning to beat him?”

“I don’t know.”

Colio waited. He believed that moment was coming.

“So run away.”

“No, I’ll fight.”

Colio firmly stepped on the ground.

“Why?”

“Because Shiron didn’t see me running away.”

At that time, the wind rapidly weakened.

“Shiron…”

Colio muttered.

“Is this the moment, Shiron?”

The wind ceased.

“Is this the moment, Shiron!”

Colio dashed towards the smiling Cigal.

“Is this the moment, Shiron Booyacornish!”

Shiron said the following at the time of dusk.

“When my words reach you…

Please go to the place where a precious person lost someone precious to them.

What you were seeking for a long time will weigh on your back.

For a brief moment, the wind will stop. Please run without hesitating then.”

Colio clearly remembered those words.

For an instant, just enough for the leaves dancing in the air to fall down, the wind stopped and Colio ran.

Cigal grabbed his sword so he could slice the oncoming Colio to pieces.

And just when Shlamuffen was about to start laughing…

All of a sudden, without any warning…

The world was dyed in a red light.

“…!”

It came from directly behind Colio.

The red setting sun shone in from a small gap in the clouds.

The sunset drowned this world where the rain and clouds were colored grey for an instant. The clouds, winds, and the three people facing each other were all dyed by red light.

This wasn't just another sunset typical of Toatt Mining Town.

It was an incomparably clearer sky.

The typhoon that came only once a century cleansed and blew away the town's ashen air.

It was the light of an unclouded sunset that wasn't seen for who knows how many decades.

That light was at Colio's back.

Cigal was directly facing that light.

His eyes, which became used to the dimness in Toatt Mining Town, were now blinded by that red light.

"Shiron!"

Colio called her name again.

Cigal's unaccustomed eyes couldn't face the light.

He instinctively closed his eyes. He covered them with the hand that was about to grasp Shlamuffen.

In that brief opening, Colio closed the endless distance between them.

A storm came only once a century. Piling these coincidences on top of each other, this was the only chance for victory.

And Colio took it.

His knife closed in on Cigal's chest…

Shlamuffen was pulled out…

A spider blade and a small knife were intersecting…

And everything was settled far too quickly.

Shiron wore a black combat uniform.

Shlamuffen was in her hand.

Her surroundings smelled of blood and the corpses of soldiers were strewn around.

Shiron's hands turned a notebook's pages.

The cure for Dragon Pneumonia was written inside. Those were the results of her predictions and research.

She slowly flipped through the pages as if she was reading it to someone who wasn't there.

When she reached the very last page, Shiron said,

"September 20, 1924. An unprecedented typhoon will come to Toatt Mining Town.

That's when that person and that man will fight. It is also the time when the long dormant Dragon Pneumonia will awaken.

To you, the injured person who holds this Book-

I know that man will try to kill you using my predictions.

However, without them, that person and I wouldn't have met. I want that person to see me. This is why I'm prophesizing this right now.

I am sorry for causing you inconvenience. Please forgive me."

After saying this, Shiron closed the book.

The one she was talking to was Hamyuts Meseta.

"However, I must also thank you.

For taking that person's bomb. For letting him live.

For protecting the town of that person, Big Brother Carthello, and Big Sister Ia.

Thank you so much."

Shiron spoke while pointing at the notebook.

"With this method, you'll be able to make the cure for Dragon Pneumonia in less than a day. I believe that is enough time for you and for Big Sister Ia to receive it.

It should be simple enough for someone in your position."

After saying so, she wielded Shlamuffen and the notebook was torn to pieces.

"However, I believe it should be erased. In case another such conflict occurs again, it's for the best.

If no one will know the cure for Dragon Pneumonia, there won't be another person like me – except for that man in the distant future."

"…You witch. Ever-Laughing Witch…"

A voice resounded. It was a man's voice that lacked empathy.

"What do you hope to accomplish by killing me? Do you think you can destroy the Cult?"

The upper half of the body belonging to the Magician called Wyzaf had fallen down. Both of his arms and lower body scattered into black sand. It seemed to be a matter of time before even his upper body will crumble away too.

“No, I’m fully aware of this. It won’t end with you. The Cult will continue living on.”

“Then why?”

“…I wonder why? I’m with that person. I don’t care.”

“You… don’t care? You will die.”

“I don’t mind. It doesn’t matter to me at all.”

“This can’t be…”

The stunned Wyzaf looked at Shiron’s face. She spoke while smiling.

“Speaking of which, today I learned that person’s name. It is a splendid name, just as expected.”

“…What are you talking about?”

“This doesn’t have anything to do with you.”

Shiron calmly said.

“I have already grown older than that person at some point. When I first saw him, he looked like an adult to me. It’s been a long time since I started following him.”

“You foolish woman. My suffering is the suffering of God. And yet… and yet you little…”

Wyzaf’s swearing was ended by Shlamuffen’s slashing attack. He became sand and was scattered away.

“I should have made this decision sooner.”

Shiron said while looking at the Magician’s remains.

“Thinking about it, ever since I let Wyzaf take advantage of my power, ever since I yielded myself to the Indulging God Cult, I’ve spent too much time on nothing. I abandoned myself to the pleasure Wyzaf offered me and lost sight of my true feelings.”

Shiron began speaking.

“It happened when I was a child. When I evoked my power for the first time, the one I had seen was that person.

In the far future, he would call my name and run forward. That sight set my young heart aflutter.

When I tried peeking to the future to see him again, my power was awakened.

I met Big Brother Carthello and Big Sister Ia and received their warm words.

At that time I was constantly crying, but thinking back on it I think I was happy."

Shiron continued speaking alone.

She wasn't talking to Wyzaf's remains or to Hamyuts, but simply to herself.

"Some time had passed since then, and Wyzaf appeared before me.

I didn't know how to doubt people, so I was lured by his words.

Since I was living poorly, I was fascinated by him.

While my eyes were sparkling at the sight of the various presents Wyzaf gave me, I became complicit to his crimes.

It took me a considerable time to notice what kind of horrifying things I've been doing.

The results of what I've carried out and Wyzaf's terrifying plan - the future I saw made me shiver.

However, I hadn't left him.

I grew accustomed to living like royalty and couldn't bear returning to my original circumstances.

I didn't have the courage to confront Wyzaf and change the future, nor did I despair enough to kill myself."

Shiron looked at the notebook's shreds.

"After this, as you know, I was praised as the Ever-Laughing Saint and obtained a large wealth. Of course, everything went according to Wyzaf's scheme.

While being showered by the people's praises, I always felt the pangs of my conscience in my chest. I felt the unbearable need to confide in someone that I actually tricked those people.

These conflicting days continued.

However, with my grand wealth and while being surrounded by my many admirers, the voice of my conscience gradually vanished.

I thought it didn't matter anymore. That there was no meaning in suffering or worrying about such things.

I have worried enough already, and I was the one who saved the world in the first place.

I thought it would be fine to just forget everything, bury myself into my wealth that would never exhaust itself, pursue temporary pleasure and live the rest of my life like that.

I have thought and lived like that until a certain day.

That day was completely normal.

It was just that during that day, I had seen the sky for the first time in a long while and it was extremely beautiful.

Looking at the beautiful sunset, I suddenly recalled the figure of that person.

I have forgotten about him for a long time – about that person, who will die while calling my name.

I wondered if that person would love me as I was then, and it became unbearable for me.

There was no way he would. That person fell in love with me when I fighting.

Just as that person was fighting, he wouldn't love me if I weren't to fight. Right, I thought to myself.

Great wealth and that person's heart-

It wasn't an issue of which was more important.

No matter how much wealth I'll pile up, I will never be able to buy that person's heart.

Thinking this, my heart was revived.

During the time of dusk, I killed all of Wyzaf's subordinates.

That would be the first Book that person will get his hands on. It's me from a few hours ago.

Whether I am going to be killed now, how I will die, and what the people will say after my death – I know it all. But I deserve that punishment.

I have no intent to escape or to justify myself. No matter what kind of punishment I will bear, it will not compensate for my sins.

I do not think of this as scary. On the contrary, I'm overflowing with joy.

Except for the love of that person, I don't need…"

Shiron stopped her words, and shook her head as if disappointed with herself.

"…I was trying to repent, but all that came out of my mouth were words of love for that person.

Aah, my heart is so sinful."

With these words, Shiron stopped addressing the future.

"Chancellor Feelea."

Shiron talked to a robust looking armor suit stand in the corner of the room.

"You can come out now."

After she said this, a man wearing a priest's garb came out of the armor. It was Chancellor Feelea.

“I apologize for keeping you waiting.”

“I don’t mind the wait, but… what were you just talking about?”

Shiron just laughed as an answer.

“Let us go. With Wyzaf’s death, the Indulging God Cult shouldn’t be able to move for a while.”

“Shiron-dono…”

Said Chancellor Feelea.

“Why don’t we just escape for now? You have already bore enough responsibility. If you were to go through a trial, you will surely…”

“It is fine.”

“Why?”

Shiron’s face was not resolute like always, but instead she smiled a bit bashfully, fitting for a girl of her age.

“Because that person didn’t fall in love with someone who would do that.”

Hamyuts finished reading that Book. She took it from Cigal with her blood-smeared hands.

Next to her feet, there was a collapsed man and another man who was on his knees.

The Magic Blade Shlamuffen was lying far away from these two.

Hamyuts was enduring the pain in her foot as she looked down on both men.

“…It… hurts…”

Said the kneeling man.

“It is unforgivable, this pain is unforgivable. It is a sin. A dreadful sin.”

“Cigal.”

Hamyuts said the name of the kneeling man.

“My soul is devoted to God. H-Hamyuts, ease my pain. This agony is unforgivable. Pull… pull out this knife, help me…”

Cigal clenched the knife stuck between his ribs.

Blood poured from his mouth.

Hamyuts judged that it wasn’t a wound that would lead to instant death, but he also wouldn’t turn out fine if he were to be left alone.

“Hey, Cigal-kun.”

Hamyuts said. She used her normal, relaxed tone.

“What was your doctrine… a human’s happiness is the happiness of God, and if a human experiences happiness then God is also happy?”

Cigal turned demanding eyes towards her.

“Right. It is exactly so. This is why it’s a mistake, a mistake…”

“So, you might have done a great job, Cigal-kun.”

After saying this, Hamyuts sat down. The collapsed Colio was in front of her.

His condition was terrible.

There were countless cuts across his body. His body was torn down to the bones.

He barely had the appearance of a human.

It was likely an instant death.

He probably didn’t even feel any pain.

Hamyuts turned Colio’s body over in a gentle way so he wouldn’t be torn into pieces.

Then, she closed his eyelids and mouth. This was the minimum courtesy towards comrades who fell in battle.

Colio’s blade definitely reached Cigal before Shlamuffen activated.

It happened after Shlamuffen laughed, after Cigal raised a miserable scream, and after he let the sword fall from his hands. The cruel Shlamuffen couldn’t let the person who tried killing its owner stay alive.

Because Colio didn’t make it in time, he couldn’t kill him.

This was the sort of victory only possible to achieve by the price of his life from the very beginning.

“Cigal-kun, you might have done a great job here.”

Hamyuts looked sadly at the face of the dead Colio that was wet with blood.

His expression was like that of a child sleeping peacefully. It was the face of someone who had not even a single regret.

“Doesn’t he look happy? Much more happy than you.”

“…This can’t be.”

The stunned Cigal looked at Hamyuts and at Colio’s face.

“This… is impossible. Why would a bomb be happier than me…”

“Who knows?”

Hamyuts picked up a fallen stone and flicked it with her thumb.

The pebble broke through Cigal's skull, gouged his brain, and ended his pain.

"I wonder why. Eh, Colio?"

Hamyuts called towards the tattered body.

"What made you so satisfied?"

The storm was already over at some point.

Hamyuts noticed that Mattalast was coming her way from afar.

His black bowler hat flew off and his black suit was sticky with rain and blood. He held his side with one hand and the other one was barely holding a gun.

"Is it over?"

Mattalast said. He probably intended to fight even with his body's current state.

"Yes. It's over now."

Hamyuts answered.

"Did you win? It was dangerous."

Mattalast coughed. A spray of blood flew into the air.

"No, I was defeated. It was my complete loss."

"Huh?"

"Those two have won."

Hamyuts pointed at the corpse besides her.

"…Those two?"

"Colio and Shiron."

The setting sun shone through the rift in the clouds once again. Hamyuts turned around and gazed at it.

Shiron was surely looking at this sunset, too.

And while looking at the sunset, she fell in love with Colio.

Hamyuts thought back upon the Book that Colio possessed.

She also had the backdrop of the sunset at that time.

It was truly a strange encounter of two people.

Shiron fell in love with the fighting Colio.

She, who was in love, went to fight and decided upon her death in the sunset.

Colio also fell in love with Shiron who fought at sunset.

He, who was in love, went to fight and grasped victory due to the sunset.

Their love came full circle.

Their pure feelings were paradoxical.

Among those two, who was the first one to fall in love?

"…Well, it doesn't matter who."

Hamyuts muttered.

Whether now, in the past or in the future, the redness of the sunset will not change. For them it was the only thing that mattered.

The two of them spent the same time in the unchanging dusk.

Fragment: An Apple, Flowers, and the Passed Stone Blade

“I don't understand what's going on with that Book seller.”

Mirepoc said.

She was in Bantorra Library’s on-site hospital wing.

A week had passed since the battle with Cigal Crukessa. Mirepoc had been admitted to the Library’s hospital. Both Mattalast, who was in the next room, and Hamyuts, who was in the next room after that, laid down their wounded bodies.

Mirepoc had no injuries, but she was forcibly admitted due to the fear of her having contracted Dragon Pneumonia. She was dissatisfied to have been hospitalized over nothing like that.

Other Armed Librarians headed for Toatt Mining Town. Due to Shiron’s cure, it seemed that there were no casualties.

Mirepoc, who had nothing to do, thought back and tried to reason about the past events.

Her conversation partner sat next to her on a chair and peeled an apple.

“You mean that person who gave Shiron-san’s Books to Colio Tonies-kun?”

“Yes. I just can’t understand what’s going on with him.”

“He certainly is a strange person.”

Mirepoc was talking with Ireia Kitty, an aged Armed Librarian who was in active duty.

Her age was probably around sixty years old. She smiled towards Mirepoc as if she were her grandchild.

She was an elderly woman, slightly plump and dressed in an elegant apron dress.

She was Mirepoc’s senior, but due to being friendly she was able to easily strike up conversation with anyone.

She was a woman who people trusted in a different sense than with Hamyuts.

“There are plenty of odd things here. Just him having the fragments of Shiron’s Book was odd by itself, but he even passed those to Colio Tonies three times.

That is too much to be a mere coincidence.”

“Was that Book seller involved in something important?”

“I believe so. There’s no doubt.”

Mirepoc strongly nodded.

“But, I don’t think he’s an enemy. He indirectly helped save the Director and kill Cigal. He’s a third party aware of the situation but not an ally…”

“It might have just happened to be that way. Even God couldn’t have expected Colio-kun to beat Cigal.”

“Still, there should be something here.”

Mirepoc held up her hair while thinking. Ireia was cutting an apple with elegant hand movements.

“What did Hamyuts-san and Mattalast-san say?”

“They didn’t say anything. Mattalast doesn’t know anything. And when I asked the Director about the Book seller she only said 'Really? That’s strange'.”

Mirepoc said while imitating the tone of Hamyuts.

“When I’m discharged from here I think I’ll pursue that Book seller. There’s definitely something going on with him.”

“This apple is delicious.”

Ireia passed the plate to Mirepoc. Mirepoc obediently received it and the two of them started grabbing the slices of the apple that was cut into eight parts.

When only one apple slice remained, Ireia opened her mouth.

“Lascall Othello.”

“Huh?”

Mirepoc's hand that extended to grab the apple was stopped when she heard that unfamiliar name.

“Children right now may not know of it, but when I was young there was a fairy tale circulating in the Library.

The Book seller Lascall Othello.

He was a Book seller that found the ones dead people desired and gave their Books to them. Such was the rumor whispered around.

Girls in love called the name of Lascall Othello so he could pass their Books to the boys they couldn’t confess to.”

Mirepoc, who had no interest in love stories, answered coolly.

“…What is that supposed to be?”

“Aren’t you interested?”

“…I’m not a romantic person.

But it does add up.

In order to grant Shiron's wishes, this Lascall Othello carried her Book to Colio.

Certainly sounds like a fairy tale."

"…Mirepoc-san. Did Hamyuts-san really not say anything about Lascall?"

"She didn't."

As Mirepoc answered, Ireia put a hand on her cheek and thought with her eyes closed.

She had assumed a serious expression at some point.

"A while ago, there were suspicions that perhaps Lascall Othello actually exists."

Mirepoc didn't know of this. It was probably from before she became an Armed Librarian.

"If he were to actually exist, he couldn't be allowed to trade and traffic Books. The previous Acting Director ordered some Armed Librarians to investigate him. I was also involved."

"…What were the results of that investigation?"

Ireia shook her head.

"Nothing came out."

"You found nothing?"

"No. The investigation was aborted."

Ireia's tone became very serious.

"That investigation was cancelled five year ago. It was just after Hamyuts replaced the Acting Director."

"…"

"Yes, Hamyuts stopped it. Immediately after she assumed office. She said it was due to it being a waste of time and effort."

Mirepoc made a bored answer.

"Then that settles it. Lascall Othello doesn't exist. That's it."

"But is that really true?"

"What is?"

"I wonder if Hamyuts-san actually thinks Lascall Othello doesn't exist."

"What do you mean?"

"Perhaps Hamyuts-san…"

Ireia stopped talking. Mirepoc waited for her to continue but she merely shook her head while smiling.

“Never mind. Forget I said anything.”

Ireia said and picked the last piece of the apple.

Around the same time, in a distant place...

The storm as well as the terrifying calamity created by Dragon Pneumonia and Cigal Crukessa have already passed away from Toatt Mining Town.

The Armed Librarians had already made the medicine for all the sick people and restored the various destroyed houses and shops to their former state.

A single man stood in this town.

He was at a small vacant lot on the outskirts of town.

It was the place where Hyoue Janfus and Carthello Mashea, as well as Colio Tonies and Cigal Crekessa, have lost their lives.

The man looked at three flower bouquets left in the corner of that vacant lot.

They were three bouquets of the same size with the same flowers. It was probably the same person that brought all three here.

The flowers were probably intended for Carthello, Hyoue, and Colio. The man knew that there was no person who would mourn Cigal Crukessa’s death.

So, who put those flowers here? He didn’t think Hamyuts would do such a sentimental thing.

Mirepoc? Mattalast? But they didn’t have any connection with those people.

It surely was Ia Mira, that kind-hearted escort lady. Recalling her face, he suddenly broke into a smile. It was rather considerate of her to leave flowers for Hyoue Janfus who she didn't know at all, the man thought.

That man was called Lascall Othello.

He was the Book seller who passed Shiron’s Books to Colio before.

“Let’s get to work.”

Lascall muttered.

His tone was completely different than when he was dealing with Colio.

It was a polite tone that seemed to also have unfathomable depths to it.

Lascall Othello leaned on the ground and pulled a dagger from inside his breast pocket.

It was a small dagger. It was of a size that probably made it convenient to be cutting fruits with.

Its hilt was made of oak, and it was shaped like a human arm. However, the shape of the hand was like that of a human who gasped in agony as their hand tried reaching the sky.

The blade extended from around where the elbow would be. It was a straight, double-edged blade around the same length of the hilt.

Oddly enough, the blade was made of stone.

Lascall held that stone blade with a backhand grip and lowered it to the ground.

"Memorial Weapon – Passed Stone Blade Yor."

Lascall called the name of the dagger. And then that dagger – Passed Stone Blade Yor – pierced through the ground.

As it did, the ground surrounding it hardened in the blink of an eye. When Lascall pulled out the dagger, the part of the ground gouged out became a single Book.

It was supposedly an impossible phenomenon.

Only Past God Bantorra could fossilize a person's soul, and it could not be made artificially no matter what kind of Magic was used.

It was impossible for humans and even for Future God Orntorra or Present God Toitorra.

However, Lascall Othello made the impossible happen with Passed Stone Blade Yor as if it was natural.

The man took out a sticky label from a toolbox. That label was of the kind that Librarians and Book sellers used regularly.

He stuck that label and then wrote the name of the Book's owner on it with a charcoal pencil.

'Cigal Crukessa'

The man took the Book from inside the soil and brushed it off.

He then muttered,

"I was surprised he managed to corner Hamyuts, but… it didn't go well at all afterwards."

He said while looking at the "Book".

"However, it was good I was able to obtain it."

Saying this, he put Cigal Crukessa's Book inside his bag.

"The value of the Indulging God Cult had fallen."

Then, after muttering something under his breath, he disappeared into the ground as if his body melted.

Afterword

Nice to meet you.

My name is Yamagata Ishio. I am a common man born and raised in a plain town near Kanagawa without ever standing out.

"Fighting Librarian and the Bomb in Love" may be a strange title for this story, but if we're taking into account only the two main characters, it is a very straightforward title. For those of you who have started reading from the afterword, out of the two depicted on the cover, the seating one is the fighting librarian and the standing one is the bomb in love. They're both strange people, but I think they're getting along.

This work has received the honor of winning the Grand Prize of the Super Dash Bunko Rookie Awards.

All of us finalists have received an advance notice from the editorial department that we would be informed the result at a certain day in a certain hour.

Of course, during that day I wasn't able to settle down at all. First, I forgot eating my lunch. Then, after having entered the same soba shop twice, the lady clerk shot a "Huh?" at me. I rode on the train for too long, and when I tried going back, I accidently got on an express train that didn't stop at the station I needed.

After this bad day, as I wanted to watch a movie and relax, I rented Kinji Fukasaku's "Battles without Honor and Humanity: Deadly Fight in Hiroshima" that I have seen a long time ago.

Rather than just being unable to settle down, I started feeling real danger.

I have greatly enjoyed the movie afterwards.

Let's change the topic.

I end up getting ideas for novels while in the toilet. Somehow, when I sit down on the toilet ideas start coming to me. The strange thing is that if I just stand inside, I can't get any ideas. I think that things such as feeling like I regressed to the womb while inside a narrow room, the sense of relief at being able to let go of whatever weighs me down, and the peace of mind acquired by being able to discharge away anything whether big or small are affecting my mind in various ways.

During the time I was writing "Tatakau Shisho to Koisuru Bakudan", I was once completely stuck. It was around the second half of the story. I then made a rotation of me sitting one minute by the desk and then three minutes in the toilet, and so on.

Then, I had an idea.

"Why don't I write in the toilet?"

I immediately rushed there while holding a notebook and a pen.

After a while of writing down the ideas that came to me, I noticed it was difficult writing on top of my knees. I then remembered I had a small folding desk in my closet and went to get it.

I only noticed how stupid I was during the midst of assembling that desk.

First, to the illustrator Maeshima Shigeki-sama and the illustration coordinator - thank you very much for the amazing illustrations. I hope to be in your care in the future too.

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To the people of the screening committee and everyone who helped in the process - I believe I will require your help from now on so I can live up to the high ratings I received.

To my friends - I will never forget your words of encouragement. Forgive my narrow-mindedness in replying to your "let me read it" with "it's going to be sold, so buy it".

I can hardly assert enough the gratitude for my family who supported me. Thank you very much.

And lastly, to you who holds this book. I pray from the bottom of my heart that you have found some value in it and that we can meet in my next work.

Until then.

Yamagata Ishio